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Critical and Popular Reaction  
to Ibsen in England:  
1872-1906

by  
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Submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy,  
University of Warwick,  
Department of Theatre Studies.  
August, 1984.

## ABSTRACT

This study of Ibsen in England is divided into three sections. The first section chronicles Ibsen-related events between 1872, when his work was first introduced to a Briton, and 1888, when growing interest in the 'higher drama' culminated in a truly popular edition of three of Ibsen's plays. During these early years, knowledge about and appreciation of Ibsen's work was limited to a fairly small number of intellectuals and critics. A matinee performance in 1880 attracted praise, but successive productions were bowdlerized adaptations. Until 1889, when the British professional premiere of A Doll's House set all of London talking, the lack of interest among actors and producers placed the responsibility for eliciting interest in Ibsen on translators, lecturers, and essayists. The controversy initiated by A Doll's House was intensified in 1891, the so-called Ibsen Year, when six productions, numerous new translations, debates, lectures, published and acted parodies, and countless articles considered the value and desirability of Ibsen's startling modern plays. The central section of this study is concerned solely with the year 1891, and considers in detail the forums for debate; Ibsenite and non-Ibsenite partisans, activity, and opinion; and audience and popular reaction. In addition to prompting discussion about social issues, Ibsen's plays also challenged the censorship system, the actor-managers' cartel, and the stock-in-trade decorous well-made play. In the 1890s, when Ibsen's themes and style changed, it became apparent that popular and critical taste had absorbed the lessons of plays like Ghosts and Hedda Gabler, and that their comparatively conventional structures and recognizable systems of signification were greatly preferred to the symbolic poeticism of plays like The Master Builder and When We Dead Awaken. Most of the later plays were relegated to independent producing societies whose technical and financial resources could not possibly provide suitable scenery or adequate rehearsal, while some of the greatest actors of the day accrued kudos in the earlier polemical plays. By the turn of the century, the Ibsenite impulse had diminished, and his erstwhile champions either promoted a false Ibsen Legend or morosely conceded defeat by a theatre where musical comedy and burlesque flourished. The final section of this study describes the aftermath of the Ibsen Year, and activity in the years leading up to the dramatist's death. General discussion of production style, acting technique, and the modernist movement as a whole are also included in the final chapter.

One objective of this research has been to identify and analyze the whole spectrum of response, among as many types of readers, playgoers, and commentators as possible. To this end, a great variety of Victorian periodicals have been consulted, and columns of theatrical gossip, leading articles, interviews, and letters to editors have been sought to supplement the reviews, learned essays, and feuilletons by theatrical journalists and professional critics. Personal accounts in diaries, letters, and autobiographies have also been sought to provide indications of popular interest and opinion, and of Ibsen's place in the avant garde and mainstream theatre.

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## INTRODUCTION

Two types of nineteenth-century English commentary on Ibsen are readily available: reprinted reviews by the 'new critics' Archer, Walkley, Shaw, Grein, and Beerbohm, and the pithy apophthegms by Clement Scott and other anti-Ibsen 'old critics.' The sound and laudatory judgments of the former are weighted against the spiteful and reactionary assertions of the latter which, although indicative only of reaction to the initial performance of Ghosts, are usually mistaken as representative of critical and popular response to all of Ibsen's plays throughout the Victorian period. By examining a wide selection of reviews of all London productions (and as many provincial ones as possible) up to 1906, including publications for different types of readers (i.e. serious journals, dailies, weeklies, penny papers, society magazines, illustrateds, and comic papers) as well as diaries, letters, and memoirs, a more accurate response emerges. Other Ibsen-related events also had a bearing on opinion -- especially before professional productions were feasible -- and so public debates, lectures and readings, and published translations, literary criticism, and descriptive articles are also included in this study.

Popular reaction was not uniformly hostile or consistently disapproving, as examination of changing tastes and tolerance of the alternative or fringe theatre that Ibsen's plays facilitated demonstrates. For almost two decades, information about Ibsen was circulated among a limited group of people, until finally in 1889 a production of A Doll's House ensured widespread fame for 'the giant of the North.' His iconoclastic treatment of conventional playwriting techniques, genre, and subjects attracted some progressive Britons of all classes but to most people he was at least partly threatening,

unaesthetic, or ridiculous, and prejudice against the 'thinking person's drama' complicated response. Almost without exception, however, his psychological studies, innovative structure, resonant dialogue, or unforgettable imagery impressed even his staunchest opponents. At first, with the social plays from The Pillars of Society to Hedda Gabler, traces of traditional technique were apparent, but later in the plays of Ibsen's more symbolic final phase (from The Master Builder to When We Dead Awaken), the deliberate experimentation with old and new systems of signification was less easily identifiable especially in performance, and less appreciated even by Ibsenites.

The high point of the controversy was 1891, the so-called Ibsen Year, when six separate productions of five plays were mounted in London. Inseparable from the Ibsen controversy were questions of more general theatrical reform, responsibility for management, the purpose of the theatre and reasons for playgoing, censorship, and dramatic literature.

A loose network of modernist producers, translators, actors, and critics rallied around Ibsen and demonstrated that unconventional managements and sympathetic actors could and would present Ibsen and that there was a portion of the theatre-going public willing to patronize these experimental plays, even if they were unlicensed. Ibsen's initial association with the avant garde was never fully shaken and throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries he was relegated to independent producers for subscription seasons and short runs. Although the plays were used as showpieces by West End actors, they were not adopted by the commercial stage, they did not attract a truly popular audience, and consequently the 'Ibsen Legend' at the time of the dramatist's death has alternate endings: artistic victory or theatrical failure. The criteria for judgment of the success of three

and a half decades of Ibsenite activity were selectively applied, just as theatrical taste and experience had been operative all along in determining judgments of the plays themselves.

In order to research and write this thesis, I have received generous financial support from several organizations, and gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the IODE of Canada, the SSHRC of Canada, Alberta Culture, Warwick University, and the ORS scheme of the British government. I am indebted also to the following institutions and their expert staff: the British Library and Colindale Newspaper Library, the Bodleian, Manchester Reference Library, the Theatre Museum, Fales Library at New York University, the Public Records Office (Chancery Lane), London School of Economics, University of Bristol Theatre Collection, the Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson Collection, and the British Theatre Association. In particular, I wish to thank Prof. Michael Booth, Dr. Richard Beacham, Prof. Thomas Postlewaite, Mrs. Enid Foster, Mr. Frank Walker, Prof. Robert Tener, Miss Ann Brooke Barnett, Mrs. Cindy Murrell, and Ragnhild Setsaas. This work is affectionately dedicated to my parents.

## SECTION ONE: FIRST CONTACTS IN ENGLAND

### CHAPTER ONE

#### THE EARLY YEARS (1872-1888):

##### A QUIET INTRODUCTION

...as the Elizabethan drama reeks of the spirit of Raleigh and Sidney and is relative to the age of the Spanish Armada, so the Victorian drama reeks of the spirit of successful tradesmen and is relative to the age of Clapham Junction. It is impossible to make laws or plays very much ahead of the general moral or artistic instincts of the people. From this consideration it is plain there can be no sudden dramatic, as there can be no sudden political, millennium. Such good as may be brought about must be painfully and laboriously worked for, mostly by means of agencies already in operation.

(Henry Arthur Jones, 1883)<sup>1</sup>

Henrik Ibsen's first play was written in 1849, but until the late 1870s, when translations from the original Danish texts first became available, his work was virtually unknown outside Scandinavia. Though his obscurity was quite long-lived in the Latin countries and in France, he was already popular and infamous in Germany by 1888. His gradual and initially laborious introduction to England formed an inseparable part of the reformation of attitudes to the drama and the restyling of theatrical arts that took place in the late nineteenth century. Before his work could be fully appreciated, however, the dramatic tastes of playwrights, critics, managers, actors, and theatre-goers had to undergo profound changes, and sympathy for a 'higher' or more literary drama had to be cultivated. Ibsen, more than

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<sup>1</sup>Nineteenth Century Review, September 1883, rpt. Renascence of the English Drama (London: MacMillan, 1895), p. 15.

any other artist, was responsible for defining and inspiring change by personally embodying the New Drama (as it became known) and by representing, as far as the English were concerned, the force of revolutionary change and the impetus for its success. Because he persistently challenged the dearest conventions of the English theatre (including acting style, the cartel of the leading managers, and popular genre) he was certain to excite controversy among a vast audience.

In nineteenth-century England, the theatre was a truly popular recreation that fascinated an ever-increasing number of people. In 1879, Henry James wrote:

It sometimes seems to an observer of English customs that this interest in histrionic matters almost reaches the proportions of a mania. It pervades society -- breaks down barriers ....Plays and actors are perpetually talked about, private theatricals are incessant, and members of the dramatic profession are 'received' without restriction. They appear in society, and the people of society appear on the stage; it is as if the great gate which formerly divided the theatre from the world had been lifted off its hinges.<sup>1</sup>

By 1890, almost every popular magazine, journal, and newspaper reviewed West End openings and included a column of theatrical gossip, occasional letters to the editor on theatrical topics, and sometimes interviews with actors, managers, and playwrights. Slightly more up-market journals like the Pall Mall Gazette (P.M.G.) simply provided slightly more up-market reviews, news, and interviews. Even the most prestigious monthly and quarterly reviews contained occasional articles on the drama. The progress (or degeneration) of the drama was everywhere debated, and theatre-goers' societies were established to carry out the discussion in formal settings. As well as intricately dissecting the great popular successes of Irving, Tree, Hare, and so on, the Playgoers' Society, the Church and Stage Guild, and societies

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<sup>1</sup>The Scenic Art of Henry James, 1872-1901, ed. Alan Wade (London: 1949), pp. 119-20, rpt. in The Revels History of Drama in English, Vol. 7 (London: Methuen, 1978), p. 7.

of amateur actors also ~~debated~~ the growing interest in stage literature and poetry, reflecting the emergence of an audience eager for a drama that incorporated European innovations while nostalgically looking back to the poetic drama of the Elizabethans and ancient Greeks. This section of the playgoing public did not represent the majority, but included enough people to support Charles Charrington, Jacob Grein, Elizabeth Robins, and other Ibsen producers in their endeavours.

In the early 1870s, two forward-looking British critics began to write and think about Ibsen, inciting dissatisfaction with conventional plays. During the following decades, dissatisfaction spread: first to intellectuals, then to a few radical actors, writers, and playgoers, and finally to the popular audience. It is likely that even without Ibsen the New Drama would have developed -- eventually --but Ibsen provided a convenient rallying-point for modernists and reactionaries alike, and his name became the battle cry for and against revolution in the theatre. Whether or not there was an audience for stage poetry and literature in the 70s is unimportant; as Henry Arthur Jones discovered, theatrical managers had but vague ideas of the constituents of literary or poetic drama, and there were very few opportunities to test public interest. Little distinction was made between dramatic art and popular amusement, and for most playgoers the choice was between the music hall, extravaganza, or legitimate theatre, and not between a pot boiler, an amusing trifle, or philosophical enlightenment.

In the latter half of Victoria's reign, the drama was a respectable amusement for orderly audiences of middle-class playgoers who liked to attend comfortable, well-appointed theatres and to applaud punctiliously decorous plays. The entertainment industry thrived nationwide, providing 'good nights out' suited to almost every taste and pocketbook -- every taste, that is, except that which desired

intellectual challenges corresponding to the achievements of the newer novelists. A small section of the audience demanded an alternative to what was still a theatre of make-believe, escapism, and melodramatic well-made conventions. Producers should, they argued, place less emphasis on the pyrotechnics of carpenters, painters, and actors, and more on the content, form, and meaning of the plays themselves, incorporating artistic commentary on the condition of modern civilization and the subtleties of psychological motivation. The only sort of motivation most actor-managers knew was financial -- a necessary evil promulgated by the Great British Public's demand for sensational pictorial effects and the cost incurred in providing lavish spectacles, each more expensive than the last. This situation resulted in a consummately scenic theatre and impressive acting, but it did little to develop the quality of the basic texts presented. The dissatisfied playgoers of London found their models in the alternative 'free' theatres of France and Germany, in the state theatres of Scandinavia where financial pressure was not so acute, and in the literary plays of Echegaray, Maeterlinck, Tolstoi, and Zola. Central to their vision of the future was, however, Henrik Ibsen -- the mainstay of the experimental and national theatres they admired, and the inspiration of so many of the lesser naturalistic writers.

It is precisely because the theatre had such enormous popular appeal that this study considers audience response to Ibsen alongside the writings of professional critics and within the context of the mainstream theatre. Entertainers in the nineteenth century, as now, sought to fulfil the demands of their audience, or to take advantage of a previously unexploited market and find within it a new audience. This is exactly what the Ibsen innovators of the 1880s and 90s attempted to do in England. First, they informed potential audiences of Ibsen's



existence, then gave them a slight taste of his genius, got them interested, and finally stage managed an 'Ibsen boom' that set all of London talking. This process is documented primarily in the popular magazines and newspapers of the day, and so they form a major source of commentary in this study. The personal diaries, letters, and autobiographies of persons involved in the struggle for Ibsen's introduction are also used, as are the comments of people who observed the events from the sidelines.

### Ibsen and the New Drama

Ibsen's first 'social' play, The Pillars of Society, was published in 1877. Two years later, the notorious Doll's House followed. In the 1880s, Ghosts, An Enemy of the People, The Wild Duck, Rosmersholm, and The Lady from the Sea all appeared, but they were not widely known in England until the end of the decade. During the 80s, important changes in theatrical taste helped to prepare the way for Ibsen and the naturalistic and realistic schools. The vogue of the cup and saucer comedy declined, as did the popularity of opera bouffe. Although a perennial audience existed for 'leg pieces' in the Gaiety tradition, a much larger audience emerged in support of the 'realistic melodrama' in which episodes, characters, or properties from 'real life' were substituted for the inventive stagecraft but formulaic situations that had characterized earlier melodramas. Henry Pettitt, G.R. Sims, Sydney Grundy, and indeed most of the playwrights of the 80s excelled in this sort of writing, and retained an audience well into the next century. Meanwhile, Ibsen was gradually revealed to the intelligentsia, to the theatre community, and to some playgoers. The first Ibsen production to gain a lot of publicity was A Doll's House, in 1889. Prior to this, two English plays had shocked the British public -- Jones' Saints and

Sinners (1884), which considered the place of religion in society, and Pinero's The Profligate (1889), a prototype problem play that dealt with sexual double standards and their consequences -- but they in no way prepared playgoers for the onset of A Doll's House. In 1891, six productions of five Ibsen plays were presented, but although neither Jones nor Pinero admitted that they had embraced the works of Ibsen, it is clear from their subsequent output that they were influenced by their contact with him and that they took advantage of the ways in which he had changed audiences' expectations of modern playwriting. In the water-shed year, 1893, Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray scored a brilliant success at the St. James's, and in the same season no fewer than six Ibsen plays (plus Act IV of Brand) were presented in London. Succeeding years saw The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith, Michael and his Lost Angel, and Mrs. Dane's Defence, as well as the success of more overtly 'Ibsenite' plays by Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy, and Harley Granville Barker.

This does not mean, however, that Ibsen prescribed or even typified the New Drama that triumphed on the most fashionable stages in the 1890s. While he was touted as a great genius whose plays led the way into the twentieth century, his advocates were also careful to point out that the imported drama should be studied, but not slavishly imitated. Pinero, Jones, and Grundy took this to mean that it was all very well for British citizens to admire foreign plays, but British dramatists should sift the bad from the good in Ibsen and use only those elements that did not offend the vulnerable sensitivity of the most insular of playgoing Philistines. Through Ibsen, they learned to achieve the delicate balance between being controversial enough to get an audience yet conventional enough to retain it. These 'new' dramatists attached great importance to the wholesomeness of their plays, and while a woman-with-a-past might be redeemed, she must never

mention what her 'past' entailed, or allude to any other aspect of life that everyone-knew-about but no-one-dared-speak-of. Thus, Agnes Ebbsmith might throw the Bible on the fire, but she was obliged to remorsefully withdraw it and revert to a life of piety and seclusion. Ibsen, in contrast, allowed Rebecca West, Nora Helmer, Hedda Gabler and his other heroines to cast aside conventional proprieties, freely express their dissatisfaction with the hypocrisy of modern society, and choose their own destiny in such a way as to avoid hypocrisy, compromise, and all the other niceties of fin de siècle dénouements. Later, a second wave of dramatists (including Shaw, Galsworthy, and Barker) capitalized on changed sensibilities by utilizing themes and situations that would have been quite unthinkable in the heyday of sensational melodrama and sentimental domestic comedy, but still they did not deviate significantly in form, structure, or characterization from the Scribean well-made play that Ibsen, in his later work, abandoned.

Ibsen and the first wave of New Dramas probably attracted the same audience, but did not appeal equally. Although it is often implied that Ibsen, Jones, and Pinero shared the same segment of the popular audience (that section of intellectual playgoers responding to serious drama), it is somewhat difficult to accept that any playgoer truly convinced of Ibsen's genius could also laud his lesser British counterparts. Ibsen's plays drew an audience that was disenchanted with other entertainments; some of his audience was 'stolen' from the established theatre while some of it was reclaimed from the ranks of ex-playgoers who had despaired of Victorian dramatic inanities. By the time that the second group of dramatists was writing, producers of the New plays were every bit as removed from the mainstream theatre as their audiences were.

### English Ibsenites of the 1870s

Prior to the publication of The Pillars of Society (1877), Ibsen's main theatrical and literary successes abroad were Brand, Peer Gynt, and The Pretenders. Ironically, these particular plays were not translated into English until the early 90s. In the 1870s, little was known about Ibsen, and only a few articles and translations appeared by various hands. The very first translation into English was actually by a Norwegian, Johan A. Dahl, who included "Terje Vigen" in Norwegian and Swedish Poems (1872).<sup>1</sup> Among the earliest references to Ibsen in English periodicals is a description of Ibsen's visit to Norway and a translation of his speech to students at Christiania University; this was written by Edith Pradez for the Academy in 1874.<sup>2</sup> Two years later, Catherine Ray translated the ten-act Emperor and Galilean, which was published with a preface containing biographical and critical remarks culled from Paul Botten-Hansen and two Danish magazines.<sup>3</sup> Some time between 1875 and 1880, the British Society of Scandinavians privately printed Translations of the Norse, a slim volume including "Terje Vigen," "The Eiderduck," "The Little-Tell-Tales," "Lullaby" (from The Pretenders), "Charity" (from Brand), and Act I of Catiline.<sup>4</sup> The British Society of Scandinavians was founded in February 1875, to publish philological and critical papers about Scandinavian literature and to exchange information and encourage interest in all aspects of

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<sup>1</sup>(Bergen: J.W. Eide, 1872).

<sup>2</sup>October 10, 1874, pp. 406-7.

<sup>3</sup>(London: S. Tinsley, 1876).

<sup>4</sup>(Gloucester: John Bellows Steam Press, n.d.). Miriam Franc ascribes a date (1876-8) and author (A. Johnstone) to this work in Appendix "A" of Ibsen in England (Boston: Four Seas, 1919), p. 163. An inscription on the British Library's copy verifies that the book was printed before 1880, but nothing more specific can be asserted, nor is there any verification that Johnstone was responsible for the translations.

Scandinavian life and culture. It maintained a lending library for its members -- presumably this little volume of translations was the Society's gesture on behalf of Norwegian poetry.

While the work of Dahl, Pradez, Ray, and the British Society of Scandinavians was probably as obscure in 1880 as it is now, the work of two other advocates who emerged in the 1870s still survives in Ibsen bibliographies. These two advocates were the first Englishmen to develop a deep and lasting commitment to Ibsen, and even though one of them (Edmund Gosse) was involved sporadically in the Ibsen movement, and the other (William Archer) did not publicly declare his sympathies until 1878, it was they who facilitated the existence of an 'Ibsen movement' in the first place, and who most consistently championed Ibsen until the end of the century. Other contributors of the 70s are of comparatively little importance.

Gosse's own introduction to Ibsen was entirely coincidental. While on vacation in Norway in 1871,<sup>1</sup> this young librarian wandered into a Trondheim bookshop and clumsily asked if they had "got such a thing as a living poet in Norway."<sup>2</sup> The manager, H.L. Braekstad (who later became an active Ibsenite while Norwegian vice-consul in London), sold Gosse a copy of Digte (Ibsen's poems), which had recently arrived from Copenhagen. Gosse was then unfamiliar with the Scandinavian languages, but the following winter he acquired a basic knowledge of Danish by comparing English and Danish versions of Henrik Scharling's

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<sup>1</sup>Reports of the date of Gosse's journey to Norway vary. Michael Meyer states that it took place in 1870 (Henrik Ibsen, Vol. 2. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971, p. 159). Gosse specifies the year 1870 in a letter, but his biographer asserts that it was 1871 (Evan Charteris, ed., The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse, London: Wm. Heinemann, 1931, pp. 39 and 223). Elias Bredsdorff describes Gosse's vacation as occurring in 1871. (Edmund Gosse's Correspondence with Scandinavian Writers, London: Wm. Heinemann, 1960, pp. 25-7)

<sup>2</sup>Edmund Gosse, "The Great Norwegian Master's 70th Birthday...", Sketch, March 23, 1898, p. 385.

novel, Noddebo Praestegaard.<sup>1</sup> Encouraged by W.R.S. Ralston (an elder colleague at the British Museum) and R.H. Hutton (editor of the Spectator)<sup>2</sup> Gosse monopolized British criticism of contemporary Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish literature, and throughout the 70s wrote prolifically about the younger generation of Scandinavian poets.<sup>3</sup> His first piece on Ibsen, a review of Digte, appeared in the Spectator on March 16, 1872.<sup>4</sup>

By dint of no small labour, much guess-work...and not a few errors, I contrived to read the little green book from cover to cover. I was deeply moved; it seemed to me that this was a new planet....

My review of the 'Digte' (shockingly bad, but it was a picture drawn in the dark)...was the first occasion, no doubt, when Ibsen's name was printed in England.<sup>5</sup>

Some time in March, Gosse sent the review to Ibsen, thereby initiating a correspondence that lasted for the rest of Ibsen's working life.

Although Gosse seems to have expressed a willingness to be Ibsen's British spokesman, it is unclear whether he intended simply to draw attention to Ibsen's works through reviews and articles or whether he was also interested in becoming the principal translator of the plays. In either case, Ibsen was flattered that at last he had an English supporter, and replied:

The English people are very closely related to us Scandinavians; and it has consequently been a special grief to me to think that language should form a barrier between my work and the whole of this great kindred world. So you can imagine what pleasure you gave me by holding out the prospect of this barrier being demolished....To have my works

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<sup>1</sup>Bredsdorff, 1960, pp. 2-3. Gosse's claim in the Sketch (Ibid) and elsewhere that he translated Digte with the help of a Danish-English dictionary are, according to Bredsdorff, unfounded since no such book existed until several years later.

<sup>2</sup>Charteris states that a man called Fisher, editor of the Spectator, influenced Gosse's interest in Scandinavia, but Hutton was then editor of that journal and was assisted by Roscoe, who was chiefly responsible for the literary pages. No record of a Fisher working for or contributing to the Spectator during this period is known. I am indebted to Prof. Robert Tener for this note.

<sup>3</sup>Bredsdorff, 1960, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>"Ibsen's New Poems," pp. 344-5, rpt. Michael Egan, Ibsen; The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge, 1972), pp. 41-44.

<sup>5</sup>Sketch, op cit.

presented to the English reading public is...of chief importance to me; and the sooner it can be done, the better I shall be pleased.<sup>1</sup>

Gosse soon wrote to Ibsen again, requesting copies of Love's Comedy, Brand, and Peer Gynt.

Gosse wrote a long article on Peer Gynt for the Saturday Review, but the editor complained that Ibsen had been so warmly eulogized "that he could not publish the article unless [Gosse] could find some other witness to the merit of this strange piece by an unknown foreign writer." He tried again with a piece on The League of Youth, but was again rejected. In this same winter of 1872, he prepared a blank verse translation of Love's Comedy, but "no one would publish, or so much as read it."<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, Gosse had better results later in the year.

In July, the Spectator printed his article on Peer Gynt; in August, a signed article on The Pretenders appeared in the Academy; and in October, Fraser's Magazine printed "Norwegian Poetry since 1814," which contained a translation of "Agnes' Song" (from Brand) and a bit about each of Ibsen's plays since Lady Inger of Østraat.<sup>3</sup> Despite this promising start, an article entitled "Ibsen the Norwegian Satirist," published in January 1873, was Gosse's last major original piece on Ibsen for sixteen years.<sup>4</sup> Until 1878, he continued to write occasional single-paragraph notes about events or new publications concerning Ibsen, and a few reviews of new and revised editions of his plays, (mainly for the Academy), but his effective involvement ended (as he later admitted) in 1873.

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<sup>1</sup>Letters of Henrik Ibsen, trans. John Nilsen Laurvik and Mary Morison (New York: Duffield, 1908), p. 231. Letter from Ibsen to Gosse dated April 2, 1872.

<sup>2</sup>Sketch, op cit.

<sup>3</sup>(Unsigned) "A Norwegian Drama," Spectator, July 20, 1872, pp. 922-3; (Signed) "Pretenders: A Norwegian Drama," Academy, August 1, 1872, p. 281; (Signed) Fraser's Magazine, October 1872, pp. 435-49.

<sup>4</sup>Fortnightly Review, January 1, 1873, pp. 74-88.

In the early 70s, Gosse disapproved of Ibsen's transfer from poetry to prose, for he valued the Ibsen of Digte and Peer Gynt most of all:

[The Pretenders] is not written in verse, but in very simple, stately prose. One wonders that a poet with such a gift for flexible versification as Ibsen has proved himself to have should be contented with prose....Here and there a little lyric, like a jewel, breaks the dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

In his first review of Emperor and Galilean it is evident that he thought prose was unworthy of Ibsen -- "It is as if Orpheus should travel hellwards without his ivory lyre" -- but by the time he reviewed the first English translation (1876) his attitude had appreciably softened.<sup>2</sup>

...[Emperor and Galilean is] a tragic poem, in which one of the most keenly analytical geniuses of our age has attempted to search out the causes of the failure of Julian and the mental and spiritual features of the age in which he lived. The language in which he has done so is strictly, almost violently, realistic: indeed realism is carried to a length which some will consider extreme. None will deny, however, that the work is one of the most remarkable in the literature of the day.<sup>3</sup>

He was eventually reconciled to Ibsen's new voice, and remarked that in The Pillars of Society "the dialogue sparkles like a page of Congreve."<sup>4</sup>

Gosse did not attempt many translations, though versions of "The Poet's Song" (from Love's Comedy) and "Agnes" (from Brand) were included among his own compositions in On Viol and Flute (1873),<sup>5</sup> and several passages from the plays found their way into his longer articles. His Scandinavian scholarship was collected in Studies in the Literature of Northern Europe, published in February 1879; the

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<sup>1</sup>E. Gosse, "The Pretenders: a Norwegian Drama," Academy, August 1, 1872, p. 281.

<sup>2</sup>See "Minor Notices. The Emperor and Galilean," Examiner, January 29, 1876, p. 131; "Ibsen's Julian the Apostate," Spectator, December 27, 1873, p. 1655; and The Emperor and Galilean, "Academy," June 15, 1876, p. 553-4.

<sup>3</sup>Athenaeum, February 12, 1876, p. 228.

<sup>4</sup>"The Stage. Ibsen's New Drama," Academy, January 12, 1878, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup>(London: Henry S. King, 1873).



thirty-four page section on Ibsen consists of reprints of "A Norwegian Drama [Peer Gynt]," "Pretenders: a Norwegian Drama," "Ibsen, the Norwegian Satirist," and "Ibsen's Julian the Apostate," all written in 1872.<sup>1</sup>

In the early 70s, Gosse infiltrated the ranks of conservative Scandinavian letters and politics, as well as befriending the critic Georg Brandes. No Briton was better qualified to write about Ibsen, and Gosse rightly won a reputation as the English authority on all aspects of Norse literature. He was genuinely interested in Scandinavia, but his main ambition was to criticize English literature; he opportunely exploited authors like Ibsen in order to establish himself as a journalist and gain the credibility needed to break into a more competitive field of study. After 1878, even his one-paragraph notes on Ibsen disappeared. Just when Ibsen was composing his greatest social dramas, Gosse's attention switched to what he considered to be a more prestigious line of criticism.

The time had now come when Gosse's main ambition was to establish himself as a leading critic of English literature; after his knowledge of Scandinavian literature had given him the prestige he wanted, he more or less lost interest in it. At the time when he was universally regarded as an expert on Scandinavian literature, he ceased to be one.<sup>2</sup>

Late in 1880, Gosse seems to have considered translating A Doll's House, and perhaps even contemplated arranging for it to be performed, but neither plan amounted to anything.<sup>3</sup> Between 1879 and 1889, Gosse only mentioned Ibsen's name a couple of times (even though Ibsen's publishers sent him copies of every new play), leaving the championing of Ibsen to others, principally the young theatre critic, William

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<sup>1</sup>(London: Kegan Paul, 1879), see pp. 35-69.

<sup>2</sup>Bredsdorff, 1960, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 39. Letter from Ibsen to Gosse dated November 26, 1880. "Med den største fornøjelse giver jeg mit samtykke til den omskrevne oversættelse og opførelse af "Et dukkehjem" på den engelske skueplads.. Det vil i høj grad interessere mig at erfare, hvorledes dette stykke bliver modtaget i England."

Archer. Gosse wrote the first English articles on Ibsen, but he wrote for an exclusive readership, and so in fact had limited success in publicizing Ibsen up to 1880. In later years, he acknowledged that Archer was the dynamo behind Ibsen's quiet introduction to the general public.

William Archer was Scottish, but because of his frequent visits to Norwegian relatives he was fluent in the Scandinavian languages. As an adolescent, he was intrigued to hear that Love's Comedy had created a scandal when it was first published -- determined to know about any Norseman who could create a scandal, Archer resolved to read all of Ibsen's poems and middle plays. Thus, he became a wholehearted Ibsen devotee long before the more controversial social plays had even been written.

When the 'World-Historical drama' [Emperor and Galilean] came into my hands [1873], I remember locking myself up in a little bare hutch of a bathing-house by the fjord, in order to devour its ten acts in the luxury of unbroken solitude. By the connivance of my grandmother's housekeeper (an old ally of mine) I laid in provisions to enable me, if necessary, to stand a siege. Even in those early days, you see, Ibsenite and Ishmaelite meant much the same thing. But how I should have stared had I foreseen that such a word as 'Ibsenite' would ever be added to the English language!<sup>1</sup>

Archer subsequently studied at the University of Edinburgh and toured the world. In 1878, he went to London to prepare for his Bar exams, but his job as drama critic on the London Figaro (1878-81) led to an appointment on the World (1884-1905), the widest-circulating society paper, and he pursued his interest in dramatic literature full-time, never practising law. Archer's sober approach to theatre criticism was incompatible with the flippant tone of the World's other contributors, but Edmund Yates tolerated this inconsistency. The tone and sentiments of Archer's column were not geared toward the World's bourgeois

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Archer, William Archer: His Life, Work and Friendships (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), p. 37.

readers, but he was, nevertheless, regarded by everyone as the most exacting critic of his time. The other journals in which he frequently published were the P.M.G., St. James's Gazette, and New Review.

Throughout his career, Archer disdained to fraternize with actors --playwrights were another matter -- except when Ibsen or another of his beloved Moderns was being rehearsed. This, he reasoned, was among the factors that distinguished him from his fellow critics: he was incorruptible, and although his reputation for unsentimental analysis turned some people against him and his Ibsenite zealotry attracted ridicule, his insight, sincerity, and wry humour appealed to intellectual playgoers. He was an authority on English and European dramatic literature, and regarded his work as a critic, translator, commentator, and historian as part of a crusade to safeguard modern values by elevating the theatre to something better than empty-headed amusement. "To me dramatic criticism is a campaign...I am intensely interested in the theatre as part of the social mechanism -- as a place, primarily of healthful amusement, and secondarily of intellectual stimulation."<sup>1</sup> Robert Buchanan called him the Young Man in the Cheap Literary Suit, but Archer's concern with the progress of the drama, shown as early as 1882 in English Dramatists of To-day, and his thorough professionalism won him much respect and admiration.

Archer was a conscientious student and promoter of Ibsen, and throughout the 80s and 90s he used his name as a byword for all that was admirable in modern drama. He was not completely adverse to melodrama and orthodox playwriting, provided it was excellent of its kind, but he occasionally confused the aims of realistic drama with the accomplishments of Pinero and Jones. As an interpreter of Ibsen, however, he was ideal -- articulate, influential, constant, and

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "Mr. Walkley in Bulk," Tribune, October 26, 1907. Rpt. in Hans Schmid, The Dramatic Criticism of William Archer (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1964), p. 53.

personally acquainted with the dramatist and his milieu. Archer's persistent advocacy of Ibsen catalysed reform in the English theatre (and to a certain extent, the American as well), and he was central in the Ibsenite nexus.

In 1898, Sydney Grundy looked back on the earliest days of his acquaintance with Archer, recalling how his friend lauded Ibsen long before the rest of London was even aware of him.

Twenty years drop from my back, and I am seated in a humble compartment on the London, Chatham, and Dover Railway. Opposite to me is a young Scotchman....We fall into conversation. We discover that we are both profoundly interested in plays and players. We discuss them eagerly; and I find myself for the first time in my life, in agreement with one of my fellow-creatures. My companion was not then Mr. Archer, the eminent critic, or I should not have presumed to address him; he was only a young Mr. Archer, a law-student, with a portrait of one Henrik Ibsen hanging over his bedroom mantel-piece. How we analysed those plays! How we dissected those players! How we discussed that Ibsen! And how we disagreed! Our unanimity was wonderful. Well, twenty years have passed, and Mr. Archer is still an enthusiast. He has not only been able to maintain his interest, but he has regarded it from new points of view.<sup>1</sup>

Archer's first article on Ibsen was a review of The Supports [Pillars] of Society, which appeared in the Mirror of Literature in March 1878.<sup>2</sup>

At the time, his enthusiasm and optimism were boundless, but he soon learned that he would have to labour patiently and judiciously if Ibsen's plays were ever to be introduced to the reading or the theatre-going publics. In 1878, he translated The Pillars of Society, but it was ten years before it appeared in print.

Two articles by 'F. Archer, M.A.' appeared in the January and February 1881, issues of the St. James's Magazine.<sup>3</sup> Despite the anomalous comment that the dénouement of A Doll's House "turns on a psychological impossibility, and is...a great blot upon the drama" the

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<sup>1</sup>Sydney Grundy's introduction to William Archer's Theatrical 'World' of 1897, (1898), rpt. (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969), pp. xi-xii.

<sup>2</sup>"Ibsen's New Drama. 'The Supports of Society,'" March 2, 1878, pp. 5-7.

<sup>3</sup>pp. 27-39 and 104-110.

balance of the articles clearly mark them as William Archer's.<sup>1</sup> The first article gives some biographical facts, comments on Lady Inger of Østraat, The Pretenders, and The Emperor and Galilean, but concentrates on Love's Comedy and includes translations of the songs and some passages of dialogue. The second article features Brand and a translation of "A Brother in Need" (a poem), but also includes comments on Peer Gynt, three social plays, and Ibsen's reception in Norway.

Archer knew better than to hope that British publishers would invest in an obscure foreign playwright, especially as prose plays by living dramatists (even if the dramatists were English) very rarely appeared in print. Instead, he devoted himself to writing about Ibsen in the early and middle 80s, in order to manufacture a demand for translations later on.

#### Archer and "The Pillars of Society"

Archer did make one early attempt to create a publishing market, however, by producing an Ibsen play. There was a chance, though remote, that even one performance might create what is known in the theatre as 'a sensation.' In 1878, probably on the strength of the play's success in Copenhagen, Bergen, Stockholm, and twenty seven German and Austrian theatres, Archer convinced W.H. Vernon that Bernick in The Pillars of Society was a wonderful vehicle for an enterprising actor-manager. Vernon insisted that the play be adapted -- not only abridged, but reconstructed -- and Archer complied, but it was two years before the production materialized, as Vernon did not have claims on any London theatres.

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<sup>1</sup>February 1881, p. 108. Perhaps Archer was referring to the German ending where Nora returns to Torvald to be reconciled. In later years he defended the play against such 'improvements,' but why he would read the German translation when the original was so accessible to him is inexplicable.

In the final version of the play, the guiding hand of the adaptor is apparent from the very beginning.<sup>1</sup> Archer eliminated the short dialogue between Krap and Aune (Bernick's clerk, and the shipbuilder contracted to repair the Indian Girl) and cut the ladies' conversation in the garden-room -- for indeed there was neither a garden-room nor ladies. Ibsen's gradual and relatively subtle revelation of the exposition and his impressionistic suggestions of the town and its prejudices were ruthlessly eliminated. Instead, Archer placed the business discussion about the railway first, immediately exposing Karsten Bernick's true character, rather than letting the audience discover it by degrees. He left no doubt about the guiding principle of the town's 'benefactors,' repeating it again and again:

Bernick. I look upon it as a guidance of Providence that I happened to come down that valley last autumn, and to notice how it was specially adapted for a branch line.

Nilsen.<sup>2</sup> Yes, but when shall we let it be known that we have bought the property?

Bernick. Why, as soon as the government grant for the railway is voted.

Sandstad. And remember -- each of us three has a fifth of the profit.

Astrup. That's not what I think of Sandstad. No -- it is the thought of the immense advantage that will be reaped by the community, by our poor fellow-citizens, that encourages me.

Nilsen. There will be work for everyone -- for labourers on the railway itself.

Sandstad. For wood-cutters in the forests --

Bernick. For operatives in the mills --

Astrup. For miners in the copper mines.

Sandstad. And the whole immense affair will be under your hand, Bernick. How much better than having it frittered into twenty separate undertakings! Half a dozen capitalists might have been richer --

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<sup>1</sup>A comparison of the MS copy deposited with the Lord Chamberlain (BL Lord Chamberlain Plays 53243, vol. 196) and the Camelot edition (The Pillars of Society and Other Plays, London: Walter Scott, 1888) shows considerable re-writing. The script was adapted to better suit the economies demanded by a matinee production, and to glorify the contribution of the male lead. Ibsen's subtle structuring of the exposition is obliterated and nuances of character and action are either eliminated or made patently evident.

<sup>2</sup>The names Rummel and Vigeland (merchants in the town) are changed to Astrup and Nilsen.

Bernick. But the community -- the society which we support  
and for which we labour -- would have been poorer.  
As it is we are bringing plenty and comfort into a  
thousand homes.  
Astrup. And we are following the guidance of Providence.  
Nilsen. And we are only taking a fifth of the profits.  
Bernick. Let us drink success to the new railroad and what it  
brings with it.  
Sandstad. The mills!  
Astrup. The mines.  
Nilsen. The fifth of the profits.

Archer sacrifices the crowd of townspeople and the sights and sounds of  
the circus's arrival. Lona's very effective entrance, quite unexpected  
and unannounced, is also cut. Instead, Archer substitutes a less  
effective theatrical cliché: the trusty telegram. Bernick cries out,  
drops the telegram, and staggers to a seat:

Mrs. Bernick. Karsten, what is the matter? What is it?  
Martha. Karsten are you not well?  
Bernick. Read it, read it....  
Olaf. Why that's Uncle Johan -- has he come from  
America[?]  
Hilmar. (Reads) -- 'To Consul Karsten Bernick -- Lona  
and I just arrived from New York -- coming on  
by first steamer.' Ugh, Ugh.  
Martha. (aside) At last!  
Olaf. Hurrah! Uncle Johan and Aunt Lona!  
Mrs. Bernick. Oh, Karsten, can you forgive me for bringing  
all this upon you?  
Hilmar. Why, there's the steamer coming up the bay!  
To think anyone connected with my family should  
have so little sense of propriety of common  
modesty -- Ugh!  
Mrs. Bernick. Shall we receive them Karsten!  
Bernick. (Rising) Receive them! Of course we'll receive  
them. Are they not your brother and sister[,]  
Hilda [Betty].  
Mrs. Bernick. Oh how noble of you Karsten!

Because there were no townspeople, their gossip could not reveal the  
history of Bernick's prodigal in-laws; instead, Borck (Rorlund), who is  
a newcomer to the town, asks Hilmar to tell him the details of the Dorf  
affair, in case he might say something inappropriate. Archer's first  
act concludes with Borck's marriage proposal to Dina Dorf. In the  
original version, this scene falls close to the middle of the act; Dina  
accepts immediately, whereupon Rorlund says, "Thanks! thanks! For I

too -- Oh, Dina, you are so dear to me. Hush! someone is coming. Dina, for my sake -- go out to the others. (She goes out to the coffee table)."<sup>1</sup> Archer's version, in contrast, is close to farce:

Borck. Dina, let it be an agreement between us that when I come -- when circumstances permit me to come -- and say to you here is my hand, that you will take it and be my wife! Do you promise me that Dina?

Dina. (Hesitates) ---- ---- Yes.

Borck. Oh Dina I love you so unspeakably -- (He is about to embrace her but breaks off suddenly). Hush, there is someone coming. (Drops into an easy chair and takes up a newspaper. Dina stands in the middle of the floor and looks at him. Enter Sandstad and Astrup.)

Most of the second and third acts are intact, though the scenes are re-arranged somewhat. The last act bore substantial alterations. Because, in Archer's version, Borck never reveals his betrothal, Ibsen's scene between Dina and Johan is unnecessary. When the procession arrives, Borck is prevented from making his speech in praise of Bernick, and the Consul's confession of guilt begins almost immediately, though details about the railway are crossed out in the manuscript. He soon sends the crowd home, warning them to take heed of his example. Mrs. Bernick and Lona react to this speech as in the original version, Olaf returns, Hansen (Aune) is forgiven, and the family is expediently clustered in the happy final tableau.

The Lord Chamberlain's copy of the script bears the title Good Name, or the Supports of Society, but this was changed again to Quicksands; or, The Pillars of Society for the performance. It was performed at a matinee on December 15, 1880, in the unlikely venue of the Gaiety Theatre, "the home of burlesque [and] the most eminent of the licensed dealers in short skirts, legs, Shakespeare, and the musical glasses."<sup>2</sup> Archer fell far short of achieving 'a sensation,' and his brother and biographer, Charles, commented that the production

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<sup>1</sup>Camelot edition, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>Lynton Hudson, The English Stage, 1850-1950 (London: George G. Harrap, 1951), p. 86.



"fell perfectly flat." Presumably, both brothers shared Charles' opinion that "the production, as a whole, was inevitably scrambling and ineffective. But the best setting and acting could not have made the play a success with English critics and audiences of that day. Ibsen's time had not yet come."<sup>1</sup> Even so, many critics were quite complimentary about the play and were fully able to distinguish between the desultory performance and the fabric underneath. They displayed a conscientious, professional curiosity in the 'experimental' performance, even if they were slightly cynical about the deluge of foreign plays and "exotic events remote from the general condition of [the English] stage."<sup>2</sup>

Reprints of Archer's commentary on the play (from the St. James's Magazine) were distributed in the auditorium -- a precursor of the modern programme -- but some people required them more than others.<sup>3</sup> Many reviewers seem to have had some foreknowledge of Ibsen's notoriety (if not of Ibsen himself), and looked forward to the presentation. The critic for the Daily News remarked:

A comedy translated from the Norwegian is, as far as we know, a dramatic curiosity absolutely unique upon the London stage. When we add that the author is a writer who has achieved a reputation far beyond the limits of his own country, enough has been said to explain the interest felt in the production of Mr. William Archer's version of Henrik Ibsen's The Pillars of Society.<sup>4</sup>

Apparently, the mere scraps of knowledge that these critics had about Ibsen made them more disposed to writing favourably in 1880 than in 1889, when the play was revived. The critics of 1889 were unimpressed by the plot, but in 1880 the Sunday Times critic wrote that "those who cannot pierce through its rather difficult intrigue to a

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Archer, 1931, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup>D. Cook, Nights at the Play. A View of the English Stage, Vol. 2 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1883), p. xi.

<sup>3</sup>"Theatricals. A Norwegian Play in English," Sunday Times, December 19, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>"Gaiety Theatre," Daily News, December 16, 1880, p. 2.

really dramatic idea have little appreciation of true dramatic work."<sup>1</sup> The play's social satire was acknowledged and applauded, and both Joseph Knight (in the Athenaeum) and the critic of the P.M.G. likened its impact to classical tragedy.

To succeed in unmasking forms of imposture which, however frequently pointed out, are still dangerous, and, at the same time, to supply a taking and effective drama is a noteworthy accomplishment. With this Ibsen must be credited. His play is tender and sympathetic, it touches a point, moreover, at which terror is close at hand, and the fate with which the hero is menaced has something of the grandeur and the irony of Greek tragedy.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the defects were blamed on inefficient and inexperienced actors.<sup>3</sup> Almost all the commentators of 1880 and 1889 agreed that a certain amount of 'reworking' would have to be undertaken before the play could be successful in London (although the Sunday Times conceded that it might be all right for the provinces). A really popular play might result if a dramatist "who understood the requirements of the English stage" quickened the action, tightened the dialogue, cut the overly detailed section, and fleshed out the characters. Evidently, Archer had not been ruthless enough. Nevertheless, alongside these suggestions are numerous encouraging comments to the effect that with slight alterations the The Pillars of Society might win a permanent place on the English stage as a truly popular drama. "The English stage would in that case be enriched with a play of more genuine dramatic fibre than it has already seen."<sup>4</sup>

While the critics did not unanimously or unreservedly praise the production, criticism is more favourable than unfavourable. As far as the audience was concerned, the play warranted frequent applause, and

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<sup>1</sup>"Gaiety," Sunday Times, December 19, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>"A Norwegian Drama," P.M.G., December 18, 1880, p. 10. s.a. Athenaeum, December 25, 1880, p. 875.

<sup>3</sup>See "Gaiety Theatre," Daily News, December 16, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>P.M.G., op cit., p. 10. s.a. "At the Play," Observer, December 19, 1880, p. 3; Sunday Times, op cit., p. 3; "Gaiety Theatre," I.S.D.N., December 25, 1880, p. 370; and "Quicksands at the Gaiety," Era, December 19, 1880, p. 14.

Archer and the principal performers were summoned at the end.

"'Quicksands' received an attentive and respectful hearing, and several passages were cordially applauded. It secured, in a word, what is called a succès d'estime."<sup>1</sup> Trial matinees such as this one frequently played to but a handful of spectators, and it is significant that any audience at all was attracted. It is equally significant that the audience enjoyed the play sufficiently to remain to the end of the fourth act and applaud. If Charles Archer's remark (which was made some fifty years after the performance) misrepresented the audience's response -- and it seems from the reviews that it probably did -- it is interesting to speculate on who the audience members were, what attracted them to the play, and why they applauded.

In an article written in the months after Quicksands was performed, William Archer wrote that "the section of the London public which goes to the theatre to think, might perhaps, if collected by tuck of drum from all Middlesex and Surrey, fill the little Royalty Theatre [657 seats]' for one night only."<sup>2</sup> The Gaiety had twice the capacity of the Royalty, but if more than a few hundred turned up for Quicksands, the critics would certainly have remarked upon it.

It is extremely improbable that the Quicksands audience was made up of the same people who turned up in the evenings to see The Happy Village, Musical Box, Kerry, and a burlesque called The Corsican Bros. & Co. (Ltd.) at the Gaiety, or else there would surely have been protests at one performance or the other, so Quicksands did not attract the theatre's regular evening patrons. That same night at other West End theatres, melodrama, comedy, and comic opera dominated the bills. One third of the pieces had their origin in the French (or,

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<sup>1</sup>'Carados,' "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, December 19, 1880, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>[William Archer], "Will the Drama Revive?," St. James's Magazine, March 1881, p. 177.

in one case, the German) repertoire. One third of the theatres offered plays by contemporary English writers but only one of these pieces (The Pirates of Penzance) ever became a classic. The remaining third of the playhouses offered classic (in the sense of enduring) plays: Robertson's School, The Green Bushes (a good example of what Adelphi melodrama contained thirty six years before), Bulwer-Lytton's Richelieu (a classic of 1839 revived by Edwin Booth), and The Corsican Brothers with Henry Irving. Elaborate costumes and spectacular scenic effects were greatly esteemed, and so Irving nightly employed ninety carpenters, thirty gasmen, and fifteen propertymen to change the settings for a production that had cost £5000 to mount, with an expenditure of £230 per performance. In contrast, Quicksands was presented by a scratch company of uneven skill; the scenery was probably culled from the Gaiety's stock; costumes would have been provided by the cast, and been quite unspectacular; the script was talky, subtle, and unfamiliar; and most of the suspense and sentiment were provided by poetic, not visual, imagery. As the Morning Post observed, "'Quicksands'...is not so much a 'play' in the ordinary sense of the word as a psychological study," the monotony of which was aggravated by the unchanging scenery.<sup>1</sup> By the standards of 1880, a remark that the ladies' costumes showed "artistic and self-denying severity and accuracy" was not usually a compliment -- unless it came from William Archer.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to imagine that an audience familiar with and satisfied by Les Mousquetaires, Bow Bells, or The Corsican Brothers would have been pleased by The Pillars of Society, even in its altered form. Was the Quicksands audience disenchanted with the contemporary theatre and (as was true for later Ibsen audiences) eager for the revival of sound dramatic values? Had Ibsen's reputation spread widely

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<sup>1</sup>"Gaiety Theatre," Morning Post, December 16, 1880, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>"Gaiety Theatre," Globe, December 16, p. 3.

enough for such playgoers to jump at the chance to see one of his plays? Since Archer felt it necessary to provide copies of his essay on the play it does not seem that he held out any such hope. One reviewer remarked that "the audience differed very slightly, if at all, from that normally seen at morning performances in the Gaiety" -- that is, the class with sufficient leisure to attend at that hour of the day, and sufficient curiosity to forsake a warm hearth on a December afternoon.<sup>1</sup> The Quicksands audience was not 'converted' to Ibsenism (as some playgoers were in 1889 and 1891) but it can be presumed that they applauded because they were convinced that there was enough merit in the play to deserve several hours' concentration. Their response does suggest that Ibsen's non-controversial plays (i.e. not Ghosts or A Doll's House) could have succeeded in the 1880s, given sufficient advertisement.

Unfortunately, no audience comments on this performance are known to exist. The production did not attract much publicity at the time and has been ignored ever since. If it accomplished nothing else, however, it reinforced William Archer's faith in Ibsen's theatrical viability. Archer was repeatedly disappointed in English reaction to Ibsen but his expectations were unreasonably high, and he seemed to expect audiences to react as he had originally done when he first locked himself in a Norwegian bathing house to read The Emperor and Galilean.

In the summer of 1882, Archer went to Rome, where he and Ibsen met for the first time.<sup>2</sup> Aside from translating Ibsen's plays (ready for publication from 1888 onwards), he managed to campaign for Ibsen on a limited scale by including his name wherever possible in reviews and books ostensibly about other things. Ibsen became part of his dreams

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<sup>1</sup>"Gaiety Theatre," Globe, December 16, 1880, p. 3. s.a. William A. Armstrong, "The Nineteenth Century Matinee," Theatre Notebook, V. 15, no. 2, Winter 1959/60, pp. 56-9.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Archer, 1931, pp. 101-2.

for an 'impossible theatre,' though probably the most improbable part of the 'impossible.'<sup>1</sup> When he saw Ghosts in Christiania in 1883, his conviction that Ibsen on the English stage was impossible was irrevocably affirmed, and until the Camelot volume met with some success in 1888, he did not suggest that another stage production should be attempted.

#### Other Ibsenites and Ibsen Projects: A Strategy for the 80s

In the 1870s, the collective efforts of Gosse and other English enthusiasts failed to make Ibsen's name very familiar even among literary people. In 1880, Archer's experiment at the Gaiety failed to make Ibsen's name instantly recognizable to theatre-goers and theatre professionals. In the years following the Quicksands experiment, however, the Ibsen movement steadily gained momentum even though some of its supporters wasted the best intentions on some of the most unfortunate projects. In a few cases, Ibsen was allegedly espoused by persons who could only harm the cause of those capably trying to promote him. Nevertheless, by the mid 80s, an Ibsenite ginger group actively and competently promoted Ibsen to literary people and tried to attract the attention of actors and theatre critics. It is impossible to name all the members of the Ibsenite nexus prior to 1889, but attempts to disseminate information about Ibsen and to create momentum for Ibsenism as a movement give a fairly clear idea of the identity of the active radicals.

Archer was foremost among them, and, although he worked independently most of the time, it is easy to see why he was singled out by the public and press as the leader of the movement when Ibsen first

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<sup>1</sup>see William Archer, "An Impossible Theatre," Theatre Annual, 1887 (London), pp. 30-4.

succeeded in making 'a sensation' in 1889. Archer met Bernard Shaw in the winter of 1881/2, but while they were certain to have discussed Ibsen during the first years of their friendship, Shaw did not take an active interest until 1888.<sup>1</sup> It is possible, however, that it was he who first recommended Ibsen to his fellow socialists Eleanor Marx Aveling and Edward Aveling. The cluster of friends and associates who gathered at the Avelings' flat or who were in communication with them were the most productive Ibsenites of the mid 80s.

Their implicit strategy had four parts: 1) to encourage each other to write about Ibsen and to translate his recent plays, 2) to arouse the interest of other intellectuals, 3) to stimulate interest in theatrical circles, and finally, 4) to facilitate publications and productions that would attract a wide readership or audience.

### Publications and Translations

In the early and middle years of the decade, few essays about Ibsen were written. Translations of the social plays began to find publishers, but some of them bear little resemblance to the originals. The first English version of A Doll's House (1880), by T. Weber of Weber's English Academy in Copenhagen, contains what may be the most stilted passages in all Victorian translated literature. Fortunately, this edition did not gain any attention in Britain until 1890, when Archer at last felt confident enough to reprint a few of the choicest passages. Had it been unveiled any earlier, Ibsen's chance of acquiring a reputation as a serious author might have been permanently thwarted. In the final scene, for example, when Torvald reels from Krogstad's letter, Weber writes:

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<sup>1</sup>Meyer, 1971, Vol. 2, p. 284.

Helmer (being dizzy): True. Is that which he is writing here true? Horrible! no, no; it's impossible, indeed that this can be true.

Nora: It is true. I have loved you above all in the world.

Helmer: Oh, don't utter such stupid shuffles....Doff the shawl. Doff it, I command you!...From this moment it depends no longer on saving the rents, remnants and the appearance.<sup>1</sup>

Henrietta Frances Lord's translation of the same play, which appeared in 1882 as Nora,<sup>2</sup> was scarcely any better rendered, at least as far as Archer was concerned:

The difficulty of translating from Ibsen's idiomatic Norwegian into our half-Latinised tongue has proved rather too much for the lady who has attempted an English version of Et Dukkehjem. She has neither a perfect knowledge of Norwegian nor a thorough mastery of English, so that she has perpetrated several mistranslations, while she fails throughout to reproduce the crispness and spontaneity of the dialogue.<sup>3</sup>

As far as can be determined, Lord's interest in Ibsen sprang from their supposedly identical views about marriage, which were elaborated upon in a long preface to the play. Little is known about Lord, but Michael Egan's description of her as "a genial crank who believed in a Christianized version of metempsychosis" is serviceable in the absence of any other.<sup>4</sup> The translation did not attract much notice from the press or general public, although it facilitated several other projects, including an adaptation by Jones and Herman, an amateur performance, and a private reading of the play.

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "Ibsen as He is Translated," Time, January, 1890, rpt. Egan, 1972, p. 141. The British Library has a copy of the complete translation.

<sup>2</sup>(London: Griffin and Farren.)

<sup>3</sup>William Archer, "Two Dramas by Ibsen," Academy, January 6, 1883, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup>Egan, intro., 1972, p. 5.



Action: "Breaking a Butterfly"

Helena Modjeska triumphantly interpreted the role of Nora in her native Poland in January 1882.<sup>1</sup> When she contemplated a second London season, she commissioned Henry Herman and Henry Arthur Jones (the Silver King collaborators) to provide an English adaptation of A Doll's House. The assistance of a competent translator (Archer, for example) would have been superfluous, for Modjeska was mainly attracted by the play's vestiges of melodramatic sensation scenes: the tarantella (a feature that was widely admired, even when the play was not, throughout the 80s and 90s), Krogstad's entrance in Act II, and Nora's shocking departure at the final moment. Modjeska was hailed as a great naturalistic actress, but for her the appeal of A Doll's House was precisely that which was most extraordinary, and which would show her skills as an actress and dancer -- not Ibsen's as a dramatist -- to the best advantage.<sup>2</sup> The services of an adapter were adequate for Modjeska's purpose: someone who could retain the desired features and smooth over the rest to better suit the British sensibility.

As it happened, Modjeska did not return to London until 1890. Jones' and Herman's play, re-named Breaking a Butterfly,<sup>3</sup> no longer had a sponsor; despite the controversy that the original play had caused in Copenhagen, Berlin, Warsaw, and elsewhere, and despite the thorough re-write Jones and Herman had given A Doll's House, it was still considered to be too serious and sombre for the British playgoing public and, consequently, a considerable risk for any manager to

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<sup>1</sup>See Marion Moore Coleman, Fair Rosalind: The American Career of Helena Modjeska (Cheshire, Conn.: Cherry Hill Books, 1969), pp. 266, 269, 314; and Jan McDonald, "Helena Modjeska's Season at the Court Theatre, London, 1880-1881," Theatre Research, Vol. 11, nos. 2 and 3 (1971), pp. 141-53.

<sup>2</sup>Helena Modjeska, Memories and Impressions of Helena Modjeska. An Autobiography (New York: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 451-2.

<sup>3</sup>Printed privately in 1884 (Schmid, 1964, p. 37). A presentation copy is on deposit at the British Library. Rpt. on microcard in the English and American Plays of the Nineteenth Century series.

undertake. After a while, Edgar Bruce agreed to present it in his elegant new Prince's Theatre (later known as the Prince of Wales) and on March 3, 1884, Breaking a Butterfly premiered. The response was, to say the least, mixed.

Nothing resembling a consensus was reached by the critics on any point concerning the script, the acting, or the success of the piece. The first night audience, however, warmly applauded the actors' entrances, and called the entire company, the adaptors, and the manager before the curtain at the end of each act with insistent ovations.

To judge by the applause it might have been imagined that a Norah had been discovered more satisfactory than Madame Modjeska and Ellen Terry combined, and that a play had been presented which contained no difficulty in it whatsoever....We [Clement Scott] are bound to confess that the audience did not share our opinion. They applauded alike her borrowed coquetry and her assumed anguish; they were loud in their approval of the tarantella; they would have encored the dances, had such an act been permissible.<sup>1</sup>

Several critics begged to differ (for once in their careers) from popular opinion, and attributed the first night enthusiasm to a high proportion of free seats.<sup>2</sup>

The critics showed a surprising amount of knowledge about the original play. In his reviews in the World (March 12) and Theatre (April 1),<sup>3</sup> Archer detailed the differences between the adaptation and the original, but before either of these reviews were printed, the I.S.D.N. remarked on how the outcome of the last act had been changed, and the Era's critic commented on other differences.

Ibsen's play was supposed to illustrate the mischief which may ensue when a wife is treated as a doll and a plaything rather than as one to share in the serious business of life....The English adaptors, we understand, acknowledge

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1"Prince's Theatre," Daily Telegraph, March 4, 1884, p. 5.

2"Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, March 9, 1884, p. 2.

3William Archer, "The Theatre," World, March 12, 1884, pp. 11-12; and "Our play-Box. 'Breaking a Butterfly,'" Theatre, April 1, 1884, pp. 209-14.

their indebtedness to the original for only the incident of the so-called forgery, but we cannot give them credit for improving matters in other respects.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the P.M.G. acknowledged that Breaking a Butterfly was "a totally different play from Ibsen's drama," with almost completely new dialogue, new scenes, and different characters.<sup>2</sup> Whether this knowledge of A Doll's House was anecdotal (as seems likely in the I.S.D.N. and other papers where the critics were not sure whether Ibsen was a Norwegian, Danish, or Swedish novelist) or firsthand (as may have been the case for the Era and was almost certainly true for the P.M.G.), the question remained as to whether even with these fundamental changes in character, plot, and outcome, Breaking a Butterfly was still unsuitable for English audiences.

When Archer transformed The Pillars of Society into Quicksands, he tried to retain as much of the spirit and substance of the original as possible while effecting economies of length, settings, and small part actors as necessitated by the under-financed matinee. Jones and Herman, however, felt no loyalty to Ibsen or his play, and made what changes they felt would be necessary to make a popular -- not merely palatable -- play. Years later, Jones asked that Breaking a Butterfly might be "remembered only with leniency amongst other transgressions of [his] dramatic youth and innocence."<sup>3</sup> It was hack work, and Jones knew it, but in Shaw's words, "A hash makes a better meal than an empty plate."<sup>4</sup> At least they did not try to capitalize on the play's controversiality, or even its name, so extensive were the changes.

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<sup>1</sup>"The Prince's," Era, March 8, 1884, p. 8. s.a. "The Theatres," St. James's Gazette, March 4, 1884, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>"The Theatre," P.M.G., March 7, 1884, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>From Foundations of a National Drama, 1913. Quoted in Franc, 1919, p. 78.

<sup>4</sup>From "On Cutting Shakespeare," Fortnightly Review, August 1919. Rpt. in Shaw on Theatre. ed. E.J. West (New York: MacGibbon and Kee, 1958), p. 125. s.a. Jones, 1930, p. 87.

In the revised version, set in the anglicized city of St. Mary's, over the New Year period (December 30 - January 1), Agnes and Mrs. Goddard (Humphry Goddard's/Torvald Helmer's sister and mother) already suspect that Flora (Nora) is in trouble with Philip Dunkley (Krogstad), a man notorious for swindling his friends in a false mining deal. Dunkley happened to love Flora as a child, and when Goddard married her the thwarted villain vowed revenge. The circumstances of Flora's indebtedness (her youthful 'indiscretion') are unchanged, but instead of giving Dunkley's job to Mrs. Linde (who does not survive in the adapted version), a minor clerk named Grittle is promoted to Dunkley's place when Goddard is made manager of the bank. Agnes learns of the villain's attempt to blackmail Flora, and agrees to marry Dan Birdseye, the benevolent family friend, if he can raise the capital to pay off Dunkley. The tarantella sequence is retained, but it is followed by a conversation between Goddard and Dunkley, wherein Goddard claims all responsibility for the forgery. The third act opens with the Goddards preparing for a life of shame and exile, but there is no falling out between husband and wife. At the last moment, Grittle saves the day by delivering the forged promissory note which he stole from Dunkley's desk in order to pay back a kindness of Flora's and to revenge himself on Dunkley for cheating him out of his life's savings. The ending is happy for all concerned (except Dunkley, of course), and Flora even manages to develop as a character, for the final line is: "Flossie was a child yesterday: today she is a woman."<sup>1</sup>

Despite Archer's and Aveling's assertion that Jones and Herman had trivialized A Doll's House until it "fit the narrow prejudices and attenuated powers of thought of British Philistinism" and left very

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<sup>1</sup>p. 76.

little of the original,<sup>1</sup> some critics believed that even in the ruins a worthwhile play survived. The Daily Chronicle found it a welcome change from the usual English fare:

Those who turn to the theatres as a source of serious interest blended with amusement for the idle hour will find in a new play...some satisfaction for the mass of frivolity and rubbish which has so long deluged the stage....Some class [Norwegian dramas] as 'heavy,' for to them the 'heart and nature' of the play does not speak; but we believe it has more than once been proved that the best interests of the stage are found to be more honestly served by such works. It was, perhaps, a concession to what is believed to be a demand of to-day, which led the adapters of 'Norah'...to 'lighten' the serious interest of the play, and to disguise the blade of sterling steel in a scabbard of tawdry tinsel.<sup>2</sup>

The writer goes on to explain that in a shorter form the play might be one of the best to reach the stage for a long time, and that even though it is not quite suitable for the Prince's (where ethereal, poetic, and society comedies are best served), Breaking a Butterfly "cannot fail to interest." Similarly, the Queen admitted that "the play itself...is not without merit...it is interesting, and at times powerful," and the Observer commented that it was "fresh and interesting....and though it may not impress very deeply, it can scarcely fail to interest and please."<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the Sunday Times pronounced that "the play is neither worthy of its authors, the theatre, nor its interpreters, and the sooner it is replaced the better will it probably be for the public."<sup>4</sup> The annual Dramatic Notes recalled the hopeful anticipation that had preceded Breaking a Butterfly and the generous amount of attention it received from critics, but could only conclude that its quick and permanent demise

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, World, op cit., p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>"Prince's Theatre," Daily Chronicle, March 4, 1884, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>"The Drama. The Prince's Theatre," Queen, March 8, 1884, p. 250; and "At the Play," Observer, March 9, 1884, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>"Theatricals. Prince's Theatre. Breaking a Butterfly," Sunday Times, March 9, 1884, p. 7.

was not surprising.<sup>1</sup> The Era and Daily Telegraph found the plot entirely unbelievable and agreed that it was unworthy of its authors, and also complained of shabby craftsmanship in the dialogue. The Era and People objected to turns of the plot where the virtuous characters resorted to crime in order to defend themselves from villainy (e.g. Flora's forgery and Grittle's thievery of the promissory note).

The acting did not endear many critics to the play. Alice Lingard was miscast as Flora. As a serious, statuesque actress, she was unbelievable in the role of a chirping, cavorting butterfly, or as the Topical Times described her, "an exaggerated blue bottle afflicted with influenza."<sup>2</sup> She was not helped by her costume: "Made up to look like Lotta, and dressed in a ridiculously short gown, she is perpetually moving, fidgeting, and swishing her skirts in a manner evidently meant to be suggestive of Frou-Frou."<sup>3</sup> A Punch cartoon with the caption "She Lingard by the Christmas Tree. 'Oh, such an artless thing!'" confirms this description (see Appendix D.). Such a character required the talents of a Modjeska or Ellen Terry, and Clement Scott, while deploring Lingard's performance, did not blame the actress for her failure. Other papers, like the P.M.G. and Era, were satisfied with Lingard:

...in the earlier scene of the play, [she] gave us quite a delightful portrait of the young, light-hearted, and loving wife; and in the second her acting was powerful, and would have been effective too, if we could have banished the thought that the whole business was unnatural.<sup>4</sup>

Kyrle Bellew, usually a Lothario, impressed many critics with his depiction of Humphry Goddard, his first attempt at this type of part. Herbert Beerbohm Tree, as the villain Philip Dunkley, seems to have

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<sup>1</sup>Austin Brereton (ed.), Dramatic Notes. An Illustrated Year-book of the Stage, (1884), p. 19. This review was based on a notice in the Stage ("Prince's," March 7, 1884, pp. 14-15).

<sup>2</sup>"Theatrical Topics," Topical Times, March 8, 1884, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Queen, op cit., p. 250.

<sup>4</sup>P.M.G., op cit., p. 4.

relied too much on the red eyes and deep lines he found in his paint box, and not enough on his talent for inventive depiction of character. Ibsen's attempt to humanize this culprit by thoroughly motivating his actions was lost on Jones, Herman, and Tree, and Punch's remark, "When the audience saw him, they could not believe he was a villain," is deserved sarcasm.<sup>1</sup> Of course, this touch of Uriah Heep appealed to some critics. Scott also objected to John Maclean's make-up for Martin Grittle, and called for acting that did not 'placard' characters with moral or social idiosyncracies.<sup>2</sup>

William Archer's verdict on the play has often been reprinted, but it is worth repeating it in the context of the public's receptivity to Ibsen in the mid 80s. He did not blame the adaptors for their mangling of a great play, for "if Ibsen's grim satire was to be adapted at all, they could scarcely have adapted it better."<sup>3</sup> Archer's opinions are very clearly presented in his World review, but are repeated in his highly articulate article written for the Theatre, a journal then edited by Clement Scott and controlled by Henry Irving and his manager, Bram Stoker. Archer sums up his argument as follows:

The adaptors, or more properly the authors, have felt it needful to eliminate all that was satirical or unpleasant, and in making their work sympathetic they at once made it trivial. I am the last to blame them for doing so. Ibsen on the English stage is impossible. He must be trivialized, and I believe Messrs. Jones and Herman have performed that office as well as could reasonably be expected. They have produced a little play of unusual literary finish, and with all its weak points, far from uninteresting.<sup>4</sup>

Archer repeated this opinion many times in the succeeding years, and "Ibsen on the English stage is impossible" could as easily have become his epitaph as his motto, except for a few sympathetic actors and

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<sup>1</sup>Punch, March 15, 1884, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Daily Telegraph, op cit. p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>World, op cit., p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>Theatre, op cit., p. 214.

producers who made Ibsen a critical and popular success in the 90s. Nevertheless, Breaking a Butterfly played for twenty three performances.

### The Scribblers' "Nora"

Although they gave A Doll's House its English premiere, the Scribblers (an ad hoc amateur group) did nothing whatsoever to promote Ibsen. Their performance of Lord's translation (Nora), in March 1885, was given in aid of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.<sup>1</sup> They used Lord's dialogue, but in performance her inadequacy as a translator was painfully apparent to the critic of the Era:

In considering the production, we must believe either that Henrik Ibsen was an idiot -- which we do not believe -- or that Miss Frances Lord is a bungler at translation, and knows nothing of the art of the playwright -- which we do. So far as part of her first act, which was labelled 'Ye Little Singing Bird,' was concerned, things went tolerably well; but with the second -- 'Scared' -- and the third -- 'Flown' -- matters got awfully mixed, the dialogue became of the imbecile order, and what was intended to be of serious interest proved worthy only of derision and contempt.<sup>2</sup>

Not all of the script's failings can be blamed on Lord, as the Scribblers cut every line of dialogue that might possibly have caused offence, and at the end of the first act they introduced a thunderstorm that caused Nora's children to run to her and cling onto her skirts.<sup>3</sup> Even for an amateur performance, the acting was remarkably bad:

They stammered, and stuttered, and hesitated, and scratched their heads and examined their finger nails, and looked at their boots, and stumbled and knocked the furniture about in

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<sup>1</sup>In Resistible Theatres. Enterprise and Experiment in the Late Nineteenth Century (London: Paul Elek, 1972), pp. 12-13, John Stokes mistakenly asserts that the Avelings were responsible for this production.

<sup>2</sup>"A Silly Piece and Silly Players. 'Nora,'" Era, March 18, 1885. Another notice of the performance appears in "Our Illustrations. 'Ye Scribblers,'" I.S.D.N., April 4, 1885, p. 70. s.a. Appendix D.

<sup>3</sup>"Theatrical Gossip," Era, April 30, 1892, p. 10.



most extraordinary fashion; and in the final act Mr Addison caused us some anxiety by very nearly upsetting a table bearing two oil lamps lighted.<sup>1</sup>

The audience was, to say the least, confused. They might as well have been watching a Chinese tragedy, or William Poel's production of the 1604 quarto of Hamlet without any knowledge of the later editions.<sup>2</sup>

The circumstances of this production did nothing to hearten William Archer, for he remained pessimistic about Ibsen's future; "the best possible translation of Ibsen's drama, played by the best available English actors, would have been scarcely less bewildering to an average English audience."<sup>3</sup>

#### The Bloomsbury Ibsenites

In the mid 80s, Ibsen began to be known to people who took a special interest in contemporary literature and social philosophy; he was, as Archer commented, "the god of a few fanatics" but those who did believe in him believed devoutly.<sup>4</sup> Lord's translation of Nora attracted few new Ibsen devotees, but the book was probably read by a relatively select group anyway. Before translations and literary criticism were widely available, social contacts were important in spreading the message about Ibsen. One important Ibsenite clique, consisting of Eleanor Marx Aveling, Edward Aveling, and Olive Schreiner, inspired a later member, Havelock Ellis, to edit a volume of plays that proved to be Ibsen's first conquest of the English reading public. As evangelical socialists, the Avelings felt affinity with what they believed to be Ibsen's political outlook. Edward Aveling was

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<sup>1</sup>Era, March 28, 1885, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>William Archer in the Dramatic Review, rpt. in Meyer, 1971, Vol. 3, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>William Archer, About the Theatre. Essays and Studies (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1886), p. 2.

probably more of an opportunistic than idealistic Ibsenite, though in his reviews of Breaking a Butterfly he demonstrates a genuine appreciation for Lord's translation, where "For a shilling the student of literature generally or of the drama in particular, or of sociology, can obtain some hours of the purest enjoyment and of the loftiest teaching."<sup>1</sup>

Eleanor Marx Aveling closely identified on a personal level with characters like Nora, Ellida, and possibly Stockmann.<sup>2</sup> In the 80s, she consistently dabbled in amateur dramatics, and aspired to a professional career -- perhaps if she had had the talent she might have ranked alongside Ibsen's early interpreters, Elizabeth Robins and Janet Achurch. As an actress, her only experiences of Ibsen roles were, however, the private readings she organized between 1884 and 1886. In the summer of 1884, the Avelings read part of Lord's unpublished manuscript of Ghosts to Schreiner. Even this partial reading deeply impressed the listener, who wrote to Ellis: "It is one of the most wonderful and great things that has long, long been written....It made me almost mad. I cried out aloud. I couldn't help it."<sup>3</sup> In November 1885, the reading was completed (or repeated) before a larger group of friends, which certainly included the poet Roden Noel, and probably Havelock Ellis.<sup>4</sup> In May 1885, Marx Aveling tried to organize a reading of Nora (again in Lord's translation), with various friends taking

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<sup>1</sup>E. Aveling, To-day, June 1884, p. 475. s.a. Our Corner, May 1, 1884, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup>For an elaboration of this see Chushichi Tsuzuki, The Life of Eleanor Marx. 1855-1898. A Socialist Tragedy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 165-6.

<sup>3</sup>Olive Schreiner letter to Havelock Ellis, July 29, 1884. Letters of Olive Schreiner. 1876-1920., ed. S.C. Cronwright-Schreiner (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1924), p. 36. s.a. Schreiner's letter to Ellis, August 4, 1884 (p. 37).

<sup>4</sup>See E. Marx Aveling's letter to Havelock Ellis in Adelphi, October, 1885, rpt. Yvonne Kapp, Eleanor Marx, Vol. 2, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), p. 103.

part, and consulted Bernard Shaw about the casting.<sup>1</sup> On January 15, 1886, the reading finally took place in the Avelings' flat in Great Russell Street. Marx Aveling read Nora, and Shaw "impersonated Krogstad at her request with a very vague notion of what it was all about."<sup>2</sup> May Morris read Mrs. Linde, and Edward Aveling read Torvald Helmer.<sup>3</sup>

The reasons for Schreiner's and Ellis' attraction to Ibsen are fairly obvious: as writers who entertained advanced ideas about marriage and women's rights while aspiring to the avant garde of literary sensibility (and, in Ellis' case, sexual psychology), they found inspiration and kinship in the Norwegian playwright.<sup>4</sup> It was through Schreiner's and Marx Aveling's enthusiasm for Ibsen that Ellis first became interested. Schreiner was supposed to make introductory remarks at the Nora reading, but because she was too ill to attend, Ellis was asked to take her place. Marx Aveling wrote: "I know you will say just what one wants said. We must make people know them [Ibsen's plays]. It is, it seems to me, a real duty to spread such grand teaching as his, and my little effort tomorrow is just a poor beginning."<sup>5</sup> Ellis was soon caught by the crusading spirit of the other Bloomsbury Ibsenites. His first public gesture on behalf of Ibsen occurred in August 1888, when Walter Scott's shilling Camelot series of three of Ibsen's plays appeared (published simultaneously in New York, Toronto, and London). This little edition represents a

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<sup>1</sup>See Schreiner's letter to Ellis, November 16, 1885, in Schreiner, 1924, p. 87, and Kapp, 1976, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>Shaw Diaries, May 4, 1885 (Blanche Patch's transcriptions in the London School of Economics library). From J.L. Wisenthal (ed.) Shaw and Ibsen. Bernard Shaw's "The Quintessence of Ibsenism" and Related Writings (Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 1979), pp 5-6.

<sup>3</sup>From G.B. Shaw, "An Aside," in Lillah McCarthy's Myself and Some Friends, 1933, rpt. Shaw, 1958), p. 219.

<sup>4</sup>See H. Ellis, "Women and Socialism," To-day, October 1884, pp. 362-3.

<sup>5</sup>Letter from Marx Aveling to Ellis, in H. Ellis, "Eleanor Marx's The Modern Monthly," September 1935, p. 391, rpt. in Phyllis Grosskurth, Havelock Ellis. A Biography (London: Allen Lane, 1980), p. 110.

milestone in Ibsen's introduction to England. Ellis commissioned a translation of An Enemy of the People from Marx Aveling, who, fired by her enthusiasm for Ibsen, learned Danish in order to accept his offer.<sup>1</sup> William Archer's translation of The Pillars of Society was also included, and lent its title to the book. Lord's translation of Ghosts, which had been serialized in the To-day magazine,<sup>2</sup> was substantially revised by Archer to form the third play in the volume. Ellis contributed an introductory essay on Ibsen's national and literary milieu, with succinct glosses of the historical, poetic, and social dramas.

The importance of the Camelot volume cannot be over-emphasized. During the next five years it sold at least 14,000 copies,<sup>3</sup> even though other editions of the same plays came into circulation in 1890. The remarkable success of this 'best-seller' would not have been possible without the careful preparation carried out by Archer, and without consistent reports of Ibsen's productions on the Continent giving him considerable notoriety in England. The time for a popular edition was right, and Walter Scott seized the opportunity to free Ibsen from his status as "an exotic of the library,"<sup>4</sup> found only in the collections of malcontents and eccentrics. The price of the Camelot edition made it affordable to a great number of prospective readers, and although 'ordinary' readers like James Leatham were apt to find the plays full of "disagreeable people, offensive topics, colourless, tedious talk, [and] tragic, unlikely, and unsatisfactory conclusions," they could

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<sup>1</sup>Kapp, 1976, pp. 99, 248-9.

<sup>2</sup>To-day had a limited (socialist) readership. Franc claims that Lord's translation was published by Griffith Farren, but I have not been able to substantiate this report; Lord's original translation seems not to have been reprinted until 1890.

<sup>3</sup>J.B. Halvorsen's Bibliografiske Oplysninger til Henrik Ibsens Samlade Vaerker (Copenhagen: Glydendalske, 1901), states that a total of 14,367 copies sold by the end of 1892.

<sup>4</sup>From a comment in Malcolm Salaman's introduction to Pinero's The Profligate (London: W. Heinemann, 1891), p. v.

also discover -- for themselves -- that Ibsen's "quietly bitter intensity was startling, and read the volume through, not with assent, but certainly with mild interest."<sup>1</sup> All at once, three respectable translations became accessible, and Ibsen could be systematically studied and judged by anyone whose curiosity might have been aroused by British or foreign commentators.

As mentioned earlier, Shaw was not an active Ibsenite until 1888, long after Marx Aveling's reading of A Doll's House. As Archer's and Ellis' friend, he would have had access even to unpublished translations of the social plays, but there is no indication that he took more than a passing interest until his enthusiasm was sparked by reading the (published) Camelot texts. On September 14, 1883, Archer read Peer Gynt with H.L. Braekstad -- "The idea is that I should go down to the [Scandinavian] club, and that he should read out the play to me, giving me the meaning in English, and that I should put it into shape."<sup>2</sup> Shaw continued taking language lessons for the rest of the year, but although he gave up the Peer Gynt project, he was a prime enthusiast for other Ibsenite projects that were tendered in 1889.

### Lectures

Before considering the events of 1889 and 1890 in detail, some mention should be made of the activities of a little-known Ibsen enthusiast, Philip Wicksteed. Throughout the 80s, this Unitarian minister habitually quoted parables from Peer Gynt in the sermons he

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<sup>1</sup>These comments were made in 1912, with reference to Leatham's first contacts with Ibsen. Leatham was a socialist but was not vocal until the twentieth century. His statement of anti-Ibsenism, the first and perhaps only lengthy manifesto of anti-Ibsenism in English, appeared in the Gateway in 1912 and was reprinted as The Blight of Ibsenism. An Analysis of the First of the Immoralists (Cottingham: The Cottingham Press, [1915]), see. pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup>See Shaw Diaries, September 14, and August 28, 1888.

delivered in Little Portland Street. At a Hampstead School, he gave classes in Norwegian, using The Vikings at Helgeland as a working text.<sup>1</sup> Wicksteed was active in the university extension programs of Oxford, Cambridge, Liverpool, Manchester, and London, but since none of these institutions permitted him to expand his repertoire of lectures (mainly on Dante and economics) to also include Ibsen, he independently organized a series of four lectures at Chelsea Town Hall, some time in 1888.<sup>2</sup> Two of the lectures were later published in the Contemporary Review, and the whole series appeared as Four Lectures on Henrik Ibsen in 1892.<sup>3</sup> Assuming that the published versions are not substantial revisions of the lectures he gave in 1888, the four topics were the poems; Brand; Peer Gynt; and The Emperor and Galilean, Love's Comedy, and the social plays. His biographer points out that in 1888, Wicksteed was anxious to ensure that the poetic dramas, which were his main interest, were not ignored as the controversy over Ibsen's social plays escalated.

That [Ibsen] had invented a new stage-technique, and found an effective motive in social iconoclasm was beyond denial. But few understood that he was a great original poet, and that behind the social iconoclast stood a powerful if untrained thinker. There was much excuse for both forms of neglect. For the dramas in which his philosophic thought and his brilliant poetic imagination were embodied were as yet only in part, and very inadequately, translated into English, his lyrics not at all [sic]. But it was precisely in these two aspects that Ibsen had powerfully stirred Philip Wicksteed ....'I have tried in the first place, to show some of the ground upon which I claim for Ibsen the name of poet, and in the next place to point out the clues to the meaning of his later work which are to be found in his earlier lyrics and dramas.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>James W. McFarlane, Ibsen and the Temper of Norwegian Literature (London: Oxford U.P., 1960), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup>C.H. Herford, Philip Henry Wicksteed. His Life and Work (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1931), pp. 92-3.

<sup>3</sup>(London: Sonnenschein and Co., 1892, rpt. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1969). Herford repeatedly asserts that the lectures were "immediately printed," but his chronology seems to be faulty. The date of the volume is definitely 1892, and the Contemporary Review articles appeared in 1889 and 1891 ("Ibsen's 'Peer Gynt,'" August 1889, pp. 274-187; and "Henrik Ibsen's Poems," September 1891, pp. 333-46).

<sup>4</sup>Herford, 1931, pp. 252-3.

Wicksteed was well known to Shaw, which suggests that he may also have had some connection with the Avelings' circle, even though he was interested in a different phase of Ibsen's work and his enthusiasm was shown in a different way.

In the spring of 1888, Archer delivered a series of lectures on Modern Drama at the Royal Institution. Except for a brief footnote in one of Gosse's essays, nothing would be known of these lectures. Apparently, Archer spoke on "Ibsen as an acting dramatist" in the course of the second address, but whether this was the topic of the entire lecture or just a part of it is unknown.<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusion

The period from 1872 (when Gosse's first notice of Ibsen was published) to the appearance of the Camelot volume in 1888, represents Ibsen's quiet introduction to British letters. In the late 70s, the British Society of Scandinavians claimed that some people had already learned Danish with the express purpose of reading Brand. Occasionally, one discovers references showing that Ibsen was read by Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates in the mid 80s,<sup>2</sup> and certainly anyone who read the Scandinavian languages or German had ready access to a good selection of his plays at the British Museum. It is obvious from the reviews of experimental performances (including the adaptation, Breaking a Butterfly) that Ibsen's name was familiar to theatrical critics.

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<sup>1</sup>See Gosse, "Ibsen's Social Dramas," Fortnightly Review, January 1, 1889, p. 121, rpt. Egan, 1972, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, a letter to editor from Arthur Clifton, Daily Chronicle, March 22, 1898, p. 7.

The period between 1889 and 1890 encompasses Ibsen's introduction to the avant-garde of the theatrical community. During these years, two extremely well publicized productions prepared theatre-goers for the deluge of productions in 1891 -- when Ibsen's controversiality reached its height.



CHAPTER TWO  
INTRODUCING IBSEN TO THE  
GENERAL PUBLIC  
(1889-1890)

The year 1889 marked an epoch in the history of the stage in this country by the production of certain plays of Henrik Ibsen for the first time in London. Those who had the good fortune to witness the first performances of A Doll's House...are not likely to forget it....The simple but searching domestic drama, with no aids of stage effects or conventions was extraordinarily direct and powerful, like all Ibsen's, but perhaps more concentrated and complete and less problematical than most, although it presented a problem which exercised the ingenuity or the sympathies of those who saw it, according to their predilections and prejudices, for a long time after. (Walter Crane, 1907)<sup>1</sup>

During the early and middle 80s the absence of serious productions of Ibsen's plays meant that his audience was restricted to a few multilinguists and intellectuals who bothered to seek out the scant three English translations. As shown in the previous chapter, Ibsen was known only to a small number of people who admired his plays but who were unable to wield their influence to make him widely known or

appreciated. In one sense, the publication of the Camelot volume of 1888 marks the end of the years of futile efforts to liberate Ibsen from obscurity; it enabled play-readers who were unfamiliar with the Scandinavian languages (or with German)<sup>2</sup> or unable to locate the translations, to obtain an accessible, affordable edition of three social plays, then to decide for themselves whether Ibsen was as great a dramatist as Gosse and Archer had, for so many years, claimed. In another sense, the Camelot volume also facilitated the second stage of Ibsen's deliverance from obscurity because it enabled almost all well-read literary people, all persons concerned with the advancement of the drama, and the majority of playgoing enthusiasts to become aware of Ibsen and to begin to take him seriously -- both in the library and on stage.

The Ibsenites' mission consisted of three phases: first, to put Ibsen's name before the general public, then to make the public wonder what the name represented, and finally to provide resources with which the public could satisfy its curiosity about Ibsen's identity and significance. In the winter months of 1889, agitation occurred on a very limited scale although two important articles appeared -- one in a literary periodical and another in a theatrical monthly -- representing prominent Ibsenite and anti-Ibsen arguments. Despite the seeming lack of activity, by June sufficient interest had been aroused so that a production of A Doll's House attracted thousands of spectators, completely changing the public aspect of Ibsen and Ibsenism and doing

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Crane, An Artist's Reminiscences (London: Methuen, 1907), p.355.

<sup>2</sup>German translations were plentiful in the 1870s and quite comprehensive by the mid 1880s. Publication of French translations tended to follow at least two years after English translations. See Appendix B.

more for Ibsen's fame than all the work of the previous decade. This professional premiere was well and truly 'a sensation.' Suddenly, Ibsen was recognized and discussed by a large sector of the population, and Ibsenites (a term coined by Clement Scott in the first line of his Daily Telegraph review) were supported in their provision of one other production, as well as lectures, readings, and major works of criticism, biography, and translation.

At the end of 1888, five plays were available in acceptable translations, and one play (Ghosts) was available in alternate versions by Lord and Archer. By April 1890, all seven of the social plays had been translated, and five of them (plus The League of Youth) were included in the first two volumes of the definitive Prose Dramas of Henrik Ibsen. By the end of 1890, A Doll's House was also available in several editions by Lord and Archer, and seven newly translated plays were offered, bringing the total works available in English to twelve whole plays, four fragments, and numerous poems. Ibsen's best verse plays (Catiline, Love's Comedy, Brand, and Peer Gynt) were translated in part, but were nevertheless obscure. A translation of Peer Gynt by William and Charles Archer was underway, but was not yet complete.<sup>1</sup> The best of the early and middle plays (Lady Inger of Østraat, The Vikings at Helgeland, and The Pretenders) were included in the third volume of

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<sup>1</sup>See the letter from William to Charles Archer, November 20, 1890: "I'm sorry to say I haven't even looked at your Peer Gynt yet. You can't conceive how I'm beset with work....Of course when Ibsen is cleared off there should be a certain relief -- but it will only be a vacuum for more work to rush into. If you come to think of it, four volumes of Ibsen in exactly a year is no child's play -- I wonder how many hours the mere proof-reading has taken." (Charles Archer, 1931, p. 191.) Peer Gynt did not appear until 1892.

the Prose Dramas, while the two-part The Emperor and Galilean, which had been translated by Catherine Ray in 1876, was translated again, this time by William Archer, and printed as the fourth volume of the Prose Dramas.

The proliferation of translations made Ibsen accessible to interested play-readers and literati who could afford the volumes or who could borrow them from like-minded friends. Although these translations did not have a wide, popular audience in 1889 and 1890, they provided the means for Ibsen's fame to spread far beyond his circle of readers. Each new translation spawned reviews in various periodicals. Translations enabled English critics to study the plays more comprehensively and comment on them in major works of criticism. By the end of 1890, the question "Who is Henrik Ibsen?" was prevalent enough for William Heinemann to publish Henrik Jaeger's full-length critical biography. The accessibility of translations and the plenitude of commentary in the journalistic press encouraged unsympathetic non-Ibsenites to examine the plays and to articulate contrasting views about their value and potential for good; this, in turn, created friction between them and the Ibsenites, generating yet more public interest in the contested dramatist. It was not until 1891, however, that the discussions and arguments that followed the Doll's House premiere erupted into the fully public debate that pervaded the magazines and enlivened public exchanges with malediction and vilification.

This chapter consists of a description of Ibsenites' objectives in 1889-90, an account of their activities, and some Ibsenite and non-Ibsenite assessments of the success of various ventures. Following this, conclusions about the Ibsenites' success in evoking public curiosity and their provisions for satisfying curiosity are offered.

### Ibsen and the Magazines

In the late 80s, Gosse began to edit Lovell's Prose Dramas of Henrik Ibsen for the American market, but his preference for writing criticism of English literature endured. For almost a decade, Archer had fought alone, but after the appearance of the Camelot volume, Gosse sensed the breakthrough and determined to be in on the take. His sixteen year hiatus did not humble him into overlooking that he had once done something for Ibsenism: "...it is a pleasure to me to know that it was I who first introduced [Ibsen's name] to English readers -- a very poor and inadequate interpreter, but still the first."<sup>1</sup> Between 1881 (when 'F. Archer, M.A.' contributed two articles to the St. James's Magazine) and January 1889 (when Gosse's "Ibsen's Social Dramas" appeared in the Fortnightly Review), articles on Ibsen per se and his plays had been absent from the journalistic press. Gosse's article resumed where "Ibsen, the Norwegian Satirist" had left off, updating the Fortnightly's erudite readers on Ibsen's work since 1873 -- in other words, familiarizing them with all the social plays from The

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<sup>1</sup>E. Gosse, "Ibsen's Social Dramas," Fortnightly Review, January 1889, p. 107. Rpt. Egan, 1972, pp. 77-8.

Pillars of Society to The Lady from the Sea. In the article, Gosse briefly outlines the story, motives, and impulses of each play, with remarks about Ibsen's new-found devotion to prose and realism, and the circumstances that led to these departures. Gosse argues that Ibsen deserves a place among the great European writers of the century but warns his readers against reactionary critics' objections to Ibsen's heavy, sober, unromantic, and realistic content and style.

Those to whom the most modern spirit in literature is distasteful, who see nothing but the stitches of the canvas in the vast pictures of Tolstoi, would reject Ibsen, or would hark back to his old sweet, flute-like lyrics. But others, who believe that literature is alive, and must progress over untrodden ground with unfamiliar steps, will recognise a singular greatness in this series of social dramas, and will not grudge a place for Henrik Ibsen among the foremost European writers of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

Gosse's defensive alignment of Ibsen with Progress and Enlightenment is typical of Ibsenite tactics during the period, and demonstrates a level-headed awareness that opposition was inevitable.

Andrew Lang is known to have spoken out against Ibsen's humourlessness,<sup>2</sup> but the first detailed explication of a non-Ibsenite's point of view was made by R. Farquharson Sharp in the February 1889, number of the Theatre. Addressing a readership of playgoers and theatre professionals, Sharp argues that the more passionately Ibsen presents a case for social or political change, the less artistic his plays become. Unlike the novel, the drama is debased by the inclusion of social issues, and as audiences' or readers' interests in the issues

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 121; rpt. Egan, 1972, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup>See William Archer, "The Theatre. An Ibsen Reading," World, June 25, 1890, p. 28.

themselves might be reduced by a theatrical airing, everyone who has the Drama's (as well as society's) best interests at heart should denounce Ibsen and use him "as a warning to dramatists."

One can never dogmatise as to the temper of audiences, but it is quite possible that the public might come to resent having its social education forced upon it in a connection where it might deem it incongruous, and it might protect itself by staying away. Although there is no doubt that the theatre may be a powerful instrument as a moral educator, the public does not go there to receive the improving force in open mouth like a dose, but rather absorbs it almost unconsciously through its moral cuticle.<sup>1</sup>

The Wild Duck and Rosmersholm were not to be feared, since in them "the social question seems to have receded in favour of the dramatic instinct."<sup>2</sup> Among the earlier, truly 'social' plays, A Doll's House was judged the most acceptable, based on Sharp's appreciation of Ibsen's use of traditional structure, technique, and subject.

What ever may be his opinion as to the likelihood of such a character as Nora acting as she does after the catastrophe, no one can deny the very fine effect of the climax and the skill with which it is reached. The various characters stand out distinctly from their background and from each other, as is always the case with Ibsen's dramatis personae.... 'Nora' is certainly the best of the four plays, as a play, and this is because it is on the whole the truest to life, and not merely to a part of it, and also to the canons of dramatic art. For its subject is more nearly akin to those which can be and have been legitimately and successfully treated in drama.<sup>3</sup>

In Ghosts, however, Ibsen violates dramatic good taste, just as in An Enemy of the People he is undramatic; although such material suits novelistic treatment, it would, on the stage, either repulse or weary an audience.

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<sup>1</sup>R. Farquharson Sharp, "Henrik Ibsen's Dramatic Experiment," Theatre, February 1, 1889, p. 75-6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 78.

Sharp's opinions were not unlike those of the majority of theatre critics, and were reiterated in dozens of London papers when A Doll's House was presented in June.

Producing the Novelty "Doll's House"

According to Charles Archer, a scheme was afoot in the spring of 1889 to give a subscription performance of A Doll's House, but when this plan failed, Janet Achurch and her husband Charles Charrington stepped in, claimed the play, and applied to William Archer for a new stage translation.<sup>1</sup> Henry Irving, thinking that Achurch and Charrington planned to present a trifling comedy named Clever Alice, loaned them the hundred pounds that enabled the producers to announce Ibsen's play for a week's run beginning on June 7.<sup>2</sup> Although Irving is

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<sup>1</sup>Archer does not specify who was responsible for the subscription scheme, but the Star ("Mainly About People," June 8, 1889, p. 1) contains the information that H.L. Braekstad and C.N. Williamson were "two of the three Ibsenites whose suggested performance of an Ibsen play brought to a head the idea of Mr. Charrington and Miss Achurch to act 'A Doll's House,'" and F.W. Robinson and Herbert Clarke, both writers, were "two other members of the Marston Club (founded in honor of the blind poet, Philip Marston), at whose meetings the idea first took shape." Whereas Archer gives the impression that the Charringtons took over when the subscription schemers ran into trouble, the Star seems to suggest that the Marston schemers whipped up the Charringtons' enthusiasm for the project enough for them to agree to produce the play. (Charles Archer, 1931, p. 167.) Archer prepared the acting text, but acknowledged the Charringtons' contribution: "Some critics have been good enough to say that the translation sounded fairly fluent and vernacular. If this be so, the credit is only partially mine. Mr. Charrington and Miss Achurch devoted many hours to going over my original draft with me, weighing every phrase and word. To their patient intelligence I owe numberless happy suggestions." (William Archer, "The Theatre," World, June 12, 1889, p. 802.)

<sup>2</sup>Laurence Irving mentions that his grandfather discovered, after the money had been sent, that Achurch and Marx Aveling were working on the Doll's House, but nowhere else is Marx Aveling mentioned in connection with the



ironically credited with having facilitated this important step toward making Ibsen generally recognizable in England, a hundred pounds would hardly have covered the initial costs of mounting the play for a week. As Dan H. Laurence suggests, the Charringtons mortgaged the salaries anticipated from their forthcoming tour of the Antipodes, and this is what provided sufficient capital for the run.<sup>3</sup> The text passed unopposed through the office of the Examiner of Plays, and a cast was gathered together.<sup>4</sup> William Archer was very involved with the rehearsals, advising on translational matters and helping the actors to understand countless Norwegian idiosyncrasies imbedded in the words and milieu of the play. Great pains were also taken over details of decor, costumes, and staging, as Archer and the producers were determined to give A Doll's House the greatest possible chance of success.

Nevertheless [recalls Herbert Waring, who played Torvald], the play was rehearsed at the forlorn Novelty Theatre in a spirit of doubt, with frequent lapses into despondency. This was, however, felt only by the players engaged, for the managers...were already keen enthusiasts on the subject. Should we ever get safely to the end of the

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preparation of the production. In theory, she could have contributed either as a translator or a performer, but Irving must have been mistaken, for Marx Aveling was involved in neither capacity. (Laurence Irving, Henry Irving: the Actor and his World, London: Faber and Faber, 1952, p. 535.)

<sup>3</sup>"The Charringtons had obtained the funds for a week's engagement at the Novelty by signing with Williamson, Garner and Musgrove for a joint engagement to tour the antipodes for two years at £25 a week, and had then mortgaged the salary." (Dan H. Laurence (ed.), Bernard Shaw. Collected Letters, Vol. 1, London: Max Reinhardt, 1965, p. 215n.)

Laurence seems to suggest that the Charringtons signed for the tour in order to present A Doll's House in London, but this is misleading -- A Doll's House was conceived as a stopgap until the tour was to begin.

<sup>4</sup>Marylou Mattson regards the passing of A Doll's House as "a surprising oversight on the part of the censor." Pigott was, she argues, unaware of Ibsen's reputation in Europe until early 1891, though presumably once he was properly warned of Ibsen's importance he scrutinized the plays more carefully. (Marylou C. Mattson, "Censorship and the Victorian Drama," Ph.D. Diss., U. of Southern California, 1969, see Chapter 6.)

second act, or would the audience rise in its wrath at the terribly dangerous conversation between Nora and Rank, and denounce us as shameless interpreters of a wantonly pornographic dramatist?<sup>1</sup>

As it happened, the premiere inspired great enthusiasm among an audience of Ibsenites, 'advanced' literati, critics, socialists, and sympathetic friends.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Herbert Waring, "Ibsen in London," Theatre, October 1, 1894, p. 166. Rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 327.

<sup>2</sup>"The Novelty audience last night...was less and more than an ordinary first-night one. Less by most of the fashionable first-nighters and by a few critics whose duty it was, however little their knowledge of Ibsen and the drama generally, to be present. More by several of the left wing of literature. All the better sort of the critics were there and undoubtedly interested. So were H.L. Braekstad, countryman of Ibsen, and Mr. C.N. Williamson, of the Graphic...Messrs. F.W. Robinson, the novelist, and Herbert Clarke, story and verse teller; the other members of the Marston Club....The Socialist literary element was present, and included Edward Carpenter, next to William Morris...and H.S. Salt....Of the women present the most notable was Olive Schreiner. William Archer sat in front...Hermann Vezin and Matthew Brodie were for the actors, and Karl, fresh from his Paris journey concerning the Roger le Honte dresses, the artists." ("Mainly About People," Star, June 8, 1889, p. 1.) Other reports record that the following persons attended at some time during the run: Henry Irving (Meyer, 1971), Edith Lees, Emma Brooke, Eleanor Marx Aveling, Dolly Radford (Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie, The First Fabians. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), Lleywellyn Smith of Toynbee (Laurence, 1965), Gertrude Bell and Florence (Mrs. Hugh) Bell (Elizabeth Burgoyne, Gertrude Bell. From her Personal Papers, Vol. 1, London: Ernest Bell, 1958) Henrietta Frances Lord (H.F. Lord, trans., Nora. A Play, London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden and Welsh, 1890), Mary Gladstone Drew, Lady Margaret Stepney (Mary Gladstone, Diaries and Letters, ed. Lucy Masterman, London: Methuen, 1930), Dorothy Dene (Globe, July 4), Lord Rowton (Amy Cruse, After the Victorians, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938), Louise Chandler Moulton -- correspondent to the Boston Herald (Gretchen Paulus, "Ibsen and the English Stage, 1889-1903," Ph.D. Diss., Radcliffe College, 1959), probably Arthur Pinero (J.P. Wearing, ed., The Collected Letters of Sir Arthur Pinero, Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1974), Miss Wallis, Harriett Jay, Robert Buchanan, Pierre Leclercq, and Florence Warden (Globe, June 13), and May Whitty (Margaret Webster, The Same Only Different..., London: Victor Gollancz, 1969). Curiously, Arthur Symonds later remarked that there were not many women present at the first performance (P.M.G., June 5, 1890, p. 3).

An Audience for Ibsen

The Truth's critic (almost certainly Clement Scott) accounted for the warm reception by describing the first night crowd as

a scant audience of unnatural-looking women, long-haired men, atheists, socialists, and positivists, assembled to see Ibsen when nothing was eliminated that 'was satirical or unpleasant,' [i.e. in an uncut translation] and to gloat over the Ibsen theory of women's degradation and man's unnatural supremacy.<sup>1</sup>

Despite his illiberal view of the spectators, Scott conceded elsewhere that "A more attentive and earnest audience never assembled within the walls of a theatre." The audience was notable for its absence of fashionable first nighters and "the rowdy element customary on such occasions"; instead, the house was filled by the favourably partisan playgoers "who have been practically driven from the other theatres by the intolerable emptiness of the ordinary performances."<sup>2</sup> The audience on the first night was not large, and probably did not fill all the 556 seats of the Novelty Theatre,<sup>3</sup> but for a little-advertised foreign play at an unpopular theatre in Holborn, the assemblage was remarkable. It was generally agreed that A Doll's House would never succeed before an ordinary audience of the philistine British playgoing public, but

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<sup>1</sup>'Scrutator,' "Ibsen's 'Dolls' in Archer's 'Doll's House,'" Truth, June 13, 1889, p. 1127.

<sup>2</sup>C.S. [Clement Scott], "The Playhouses," I.L.N., June 15, 1889, p. 774; Athenaeum, June 15, 1889, p. 769; G.B.S[haw], "A Play by Henrik Ibsen in London," Manchester Guardian, June 8, 1889, rpt. Wisenthal, 1979, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup>Diana Howard reports a capacity of 650, but the figures given for the stalls, dress circle, gallery, and boxes total 556, and it is certain that there was no standing crowd at the premiere of A Doll's House. (London Theatres and Music Halls 1850-1950, London: The Library Association, 1970.)

apparently the first night crowd was so enthusiastic and the theatrical reviews so negative that on subsequent nights the house was filled again and again by playgoers trying to find the truth of the matter. A Doll's House drew thousands of spectators in the following weeks. The production was extremely controversial -- so much so that on June 13, Archer called it "the great event of the week -- almost of the season. It has been more talked about and written about than even The Profligate. It holds the great B.P. [British Public] like a vice -- and what's more, they pay to see it."<sup>1</sup> The enthusiasm and controversy generated during the first week convinced the managers to extend the run by a fortnight. "If we may measure fame by mileage of newspaper comment," Archer wrote near the end of the run, "Henrik Ibsen has for the past month been the most famous man in the English literary world."<sup>2</sup> The Charringtons took in between thirty five and forty five pounds per performance, enabling them to just about break even. They might have played for several more weeks if their departure for Australia had not forced a closure on June 29.

Altogether, twenty seven performances were given. Although the matinees (which occurred twice weekly, on Wednesdays and Saturdays) were not as well attended as the evening performances (on the afternoon Elizabeth Robins attended, she discovered a "sparse, rather dingy audience"),<sup>3</sup> the house was probably filled to capacity at night. At

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from William Archer to Charles Archer, June 13, 1889. (Charles Archer, 1931, p. 181.)

<sup>2</sup>William Archer, "Ibsen and English Criticism," Fortnightly Review, July 1, 1889, p. 30. Rpt. Egan, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Robins, Ibsen and the Actress (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), p. 10.

best, if every seat was sold at every performance, 15,012 persons could have seen A Doll's House; at worst, if between 500 and 550 people attended each evening, and a mere fifty attended each matinee, attendance adds up to between 10,350 and 11,350 -- still not an inconsiderable sum. But who bought these seats?

First night critics were confident that the play would not appeal to 'ordinary playgoers,' but since it ran for just over three weeks it is unlikely that thousands of Ibsen worshippers were found to fill the seats night after night. A Doll's House attracted people who were interested in contemporary literature, and/or who had literary aspirations themselves -- such people included affirmed Ibsenites as well as anti-Ibsen converts and people whose knowledge of Ibsen was minimal. A commentator in the P.M.G. discovered "some poor and common enough" people in the pit (see below), and W.B. Yeats remarked on a middle-aged washerwoman who sat in the gallery. Undoubtedly, a few playgoers went in complete ignorance of what they would see -- Yeats' washerwoman, for example, probably expected a pantomimic entertainment suitable for the young child that accompanied her, and by the middle of the first act she had realized her mistake and departed.<sup>1</sup> Of those who went deliberately and who stayed to the end of the play could be found people of all classes, from all walks of life, and with all degrees of literary sophistication. Within days of the premiere, anti-Ibsen critics were grumbling about the dramatic 'craze' of Ibsenism that had

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<sup>1</sup>W.B. Yeats, Autobiography (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 279.

set in among a clique of 'faddists'; it is probably reasonable to suggest that the 'Ibsen faddists' were as much a mixed sort of people as the audiences.

Ibsenite critics insisted that the 'average playgoer' was as enthralled by A Doll's House as the first night audience had been, and that it was only the members of the press who managed to resist its appeal. The P.M.G.'s commentator compared the critics' behaviour on the first night to the response of the pittites later in the run. The passage is worth quoting at length:

While the 'Doll's House' was running at the Novelty I was unfortunately only able to go twice. The first time I went professionally. I sat in the stalls, surrounded, I suppose, by the elite of the London press. Early I became aware that these gentlemen as a body held a brief for Society. They were solicitous about its foundations. They had come prepared to defend those objects of solicitude at any sacrifice -- even of critical coherence. A stern championship of the Home, the Hearth, the Family, glittered cold in every eye; nor was I reduced to gathering this purpose from silent indications. They stirred, they hemmed, they snorted. They pronounced expletives and protests. 'Morbidity stuff,' 'Dull twaddle,' 'Call this a play?' -- these were among the more articulate manifestations. In a word, these gentlemen were plainly bent on asserting, either the superiority of their morals, or else the inferiority of their manners. Next day I looked for the morning papers with interest, and read their comments without surprise. So much for the first night in the critical stalls.

On the other occasion I went to the pit. Never was a greater contrast. A mixed lot of people they were, some poor and common enough. But all keen, struck, attentive; sympathetic and curious by turns. At the stage where the Press had failed any longer to contain itself, the Public became more than ever all eyes, all ears. Questioning there was, no doubt, a mood of puzzlement and challenge. But stupidity and ear-stopped claquerie, none. A drunken man or so, perhaps -- otherwise nothing akin to the atmosphere of first-night criticism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Dramatic Criticism as She is wrote. By one who has sat among the critics," P.M.G., July 19, 1889, p. 2.

Shaw wrote that the gallery crowd recognized the true villain among the characters, and sympathized with Nora when she made the great discovery of the final act. They were not necessarily in favour of her decision to leave her home and family, however: "Audiences are not yet trained in the dynamics of the 'will to live,' and when Miss Achurch said 'I must, I must,' the audience, not having read Schopenhauer, did not quite see it."<sup>1</sup> In the Daily Telegraph's updated notice of June 14, Scott confessed amusement when he observed "the astonished faces of men and women alike" when told that Nora was leaving without any regrets because "her pride had been wounded or her egotism thwarted."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the first night reviewer of the P.M.G. found it "amusing to see the representatives of the British public sitting astonished and bewildered before the sublime audacity of this third act" after they had been stirred to enthusiasm by the first two.<sup>3</sup> But, as Shaw remarked: "It is all the more significant that they submitted to Ibsen without a murmur."<sup>4</sup>

### Critical Reaction

The 'old guard' of dramatic criticism was decidedly unfriendly toward A Doll's House. The Ibsenites were as yet too few to really put up a defense against the barrage of orthodoxy. Lynton Hudson falsely

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<sup>1</sup>Manchester Guardian, *op cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>[C. Scott], "Dramatic and Musical," Daily Telegraph, June 14, 1889, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>"At 'The Doll's House' Last Night," P.M.G., June 8, 1889, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>Manchester Guardian, *op cit.*, p. 77.

suggests that a war of exaggeration followed A Doll's House, with "Ancients" and "Moderns" acting on the explicit commands of their leaders.

Ancients and Moderns ranged themselves in two opposing camps behind their leaders, Clement Scott and William Archer....in writing of Ibsen the mot d'ordre was unequivocal: mud-sling or rave. The Moderns put in a few extra ecstatic adjectives to meet the excess of abuse anticipated from the other side; the Ancients hit harder than they felt the truth demanded in order to get a fair hearing.<sup>1</sup>

Each side was defensive of its own values, but the "Ancients" had no worries about getting a fair hearing (only six out of twenty nine London reviews collected for this study exhibit understanding of the play and sanction it as a dramatic representation, and only one of these critics was a 'committed' Ibsenite).<sup>2</sup> There was very little exchange of opinion between Ibsenites and non-Ibsenites in the press, and only infrequently did critics redress accusations on the letters pages.<sup>3</sup> Only after the play closed, in July, did Archer print an article defending Ibsen against the attacks of the philistines, whom he likened to a party of children discussing A Doll's House around the nursery tea-table.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, Ibsenites upheld and exemplified the virtues of well-tempered argument and quality writing -- in sharp contrast to the anti-Ibsenites' work -- which tends to give their

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<sup>1</sup>Hudson, 1951, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup>The six papers are the Athenaeum, Daily Chronicle, Gentleman's Magazine, Globe, P.M.G., and World.

<sup>3</sup>See P.M.G., June 11, 1889, p. 7, a letter by Robert Buchanan, and Shaw's reply, June 14. s.a. C.H. Herford's letter in the Academy, June 22, 1889, rpt. Egan, pp. 109-10.

<sup>4</sup>William Archer, Fortnightly Review, op cit., pp. 307-7, rpt. Egan, 1972, pp. 115-23.



reviews more credibility, but this was not enough to balance the scales and ready the Ibsenites for battle. All in all, the journalistic evidence shows that it was more of a massacre than a fight.

In the main, non-Ibsenites were concerned about the content and meaning of A Doll's House, and made very few comments about its style. This was partly due to the conventionality of A Doll's House (relative to other Ibsen dramas) and close resemblance, for two and a half acts, to the well-made play. The following quotation, from Life, is fairly indicative:

A Doll's House is a curious mixture of sham science, false morality, and genuine drama; and, as the false morality is for the most part presented in a lump in the final portion of the last act, a perfectly acceptable play might be made out of it by a single act of amputation....From this point A Doll's House becomes dramatically unsatisfactory, and morally absurd.<sup>1</sup>

Later, however, after it had been pointed out that Ibsen was a stylistic innovator, critics volunteered comments about the structure, dialogue, and form of other plays. In 1889, the acting of A Doll's House attracted a fair number of comments, but not as many as in later revivals, when acting formed the basis of reviews. When writing on this production, reviewers kept in mind the experimental nature of the project (i.e. the uncommerciality of the venture, and the managers' testing of Ibsen's palatability among the English public) and often seemed to be giving feedback or advice to Charrington on the unlikelihood of A Doll's House succeeding in the ordinary environment of a West End house or with 'ordinary playgoers.' Although the non-Ibsenite critics attempted to subdue their bias against Ibsen (or at least

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<sup>1</sup>"In the Stalls," Life, June 15, 1889, pp. 498-9.

claimed to do so for the purpose of objective reviewing), confusion, prejudice, and inflexibility were important factors in determining their final judgments. Several critics wrote approvingly of aspects other than Janet Achurch's acting, which was universally praised. In most cases, however, the shock of encountering, for the first time in most critics' careers, a serious polemical drama that was theatrical without relying exclusively on mid-Victorian playwriting conventions hindered the orthodox from writing with understanding or appreciation of the play.

#### Varieties of Response

In his article, "Ibsen and English Criticism," Archer identifies three main objections that frequently appear in non-Ibsenites' reviews: 1) Ibsen places didactic considerations higher than artistic ones, 2) Ibsen's argument is neither new nor true, and 3) in order to dramatize his thesis, Ibsen transgresses the bounds of theatrical propriety.<sup>1</sup> The first and third of these objections were also tendered by Sharp in the Theatre. In her dissertation on drama critics' reactions to certain Ibsen plays, Ann Jennings identifies four thematic controversies that arose from the 1889 production, as critics responded to Ibsen's attacks on previously unquestioned social codes. The

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<sup>1</sup>Fortnightly Review, July 1889, pp. 30-7, rpt. Egan, pp. 115-123.

controversies were: 1) Nora as a woman, a wife, and a mother, 2) Victorian manhood, 3) women's social roles and individuality, and 4) heredity.<sup>1</sup>

These objections and strains of controversy were largely predetermined by the prejudices of individuals. Critics' and ordinary playgoers' reactions had few variants, and were largely determined by whether or not they were predisposed to be sympathetic or unsympathetic spectators. Classic responses can be synthesized from all available opinions about the production, including critical reviews and comments of eminent audience members recorded in diaries, letters, and memoirs. Neither of the two response schemes presented here exactly reproduce the reaction of any one commentator, but instead typify and generalize the responses of all the preinclined sympathetic or unsympathetic spectators.

#### -- Reactions of Unsympathetic Playgoers

The response of unsympathetic playgoers is far more complicated than that of their sympathetic counterparts. One assumes that most of the unsympathetic playgoers had been at least vaguely aware of criticism about Ibsen's didacticism and unorthodoxy before they entered the auditorium, or that they were conscious that Ibsen's plays had stirred controversy and dissent when they were produced elsewhere, and that

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<sup>1</sup>Ann S. Jennings, "The Reactions of London's Drama Critics to Certain Plays by Henrik Ibsen, Harold Pinter and Edward Bond," Ph.D. Diss., Florida State University, 1973. See her chapter on A Doll's House, pp. 15-39.

they deviated from the status quo of playwriting. These are the conditions which account for an unsympathetic predisposition, no matter how passively or actively the prejudice was held. One also assumes that the playgoers in question regarded the theatre as a worthwhile institution with the capacity and obligation to provide entertainment. Furthermore, it is presumed that the playgoers, though unsympathetic toward Ibsen, responded honestly toward A Doll's House insofar as their partiality permitted them, that they regarded their attendance at the Novelty as a test of Ibsen which could result in any conclusion, and that they believed that empiricism was a good method of discovering their own feelings about A Doll's House.

Without exception, unsympathetic playgoers seemed to be forced, by their prejudices, to discern at least one of the following flaws in the technique of the playwright: 1) incompetent craftsmanship, 2) a didactic purpose that took precedence over artistic considerations, and 3) faulty or untrue reasoning or philosophy. The product could then only be perceived as an artless play and/or a piece of propaganda. The perceived consequences of such a drama in performance result in two more objections that are, to a certain extent, similar but which result in different ultimate responses to the play.

Critics who criticize the play for parochialism and/or because it presents an untrue situation by misrepresenting what Nora (and/or Helmer) would actually do in such circumstances, eventually condemn A Doll's House because it is stale and passé, or because it is utterly implausible. Both perceptions lead to the ultimate response of disbelief and boredom. Critics who attack the play because its

teaching is false echo the complaint that the play misrepresents life, but tend to incorporate moral values into their argument and attack the 'unhealthy' passages and 'corrupting' implications. This objection leads to offense and dismissal. It is very curious that even though many critics attacked A Doll's House on one of these charges, they often hinted that because the play was so well presented (in spite of its flaws) they were interested throughout the performance. Sometimes critics took a short-cut to the conclusion that the play interested them, without specifying objections. Of those who were interested, some felt a detached interest at the same time as feeling disbelief and boredom, or offense and dismissal. A few others were truly enthralled by the play, and as a result, changed their unsympathetic disposition and became either genuinely converted to Ibsenism or caught up by the 'craze' of the day. This latter outcome caused the still-unsympathetic critics to write with harsh derision about the swayed playgoers and about the whole Doll's House experiment, since they believed that it converted people to a worthless idea and caused a great deal of fuss and trouble, but would soon fade into oblivion anyway.

Frederick Wedmore's Academy review typifies the complaint that A Doll's House presents a provincial and incorrect depiction of life, with a lesson that was not needed by the citizens of London. He thought of Ibsen as an interesting missionary, but not a great artist. He did not quarrel with the idea that women should be treated as human beings and not as the playthings of men, but argued (as did the Times critic) that this idea had been accepted and adopted by all classes of Britons for the last century:

I should have thought, I confess, that, in 1889, intelligent England, and yet more assuredly intelligent America, had got beyond the need of any such teaching. To say this is not to invalidate the worth of Ibsen in Scandinavia or Germany, where conversions have yet to be made to views which France and England have accepted, off and on, for much more than a hundred years.... London is not the place in which the most pressing of our needs is to learn Henrik Ibsen's sapient lesson. With the lower class woman, doing as much as a man, in her own way, to earn the family loaf; with the 'young person' of the quite ordinary middle classes, presumably so much brighter, and so much fuller of initiative, than the youth with whom she condescends to consort; with the woman of the upper middle class and of the higher classes giving to society half its value and more than half its charm -- nay, rising now and again to such heights of intelligence that she can voluntarily put her name to a memorial against the suffrage being ever conferred upon her: with these things so, we do not require Ibsen's tearful argument.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, according to Wedmore, Ibsen's argument is commendable though too parochial and out of date to be of interest in late nineteenth-century England. Both of the I.S.D.N.'s reviewers objected to the quality of dramatic writing in A Doll's House, which, despite some good acting scenes, is generally "hopelessly whimsical, illogical, and self-contradictory."<sup>2</sup> The 'Captious Critic,' found the play so boring and commonplace that he likened it to a dramatization of the preparation of a Sunday dinner, with every detail from start to finish gloriously portrayed in all its lurid dreariness.

This wonderful freshness of Ibsen, from which we were to derive such pleasure and instruction, seems to me to consist largely in the attenuation of matters so obvious in our everyday life that on the stage -- before Ibsen came -- it was held sufficient to take them for granted.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick Wedmore, "The Stage. Ibsen in London," Academy, June 15, 1889, pp. 419-20, rpt. Egan, pp. 167-8 s.a. "Novelty Theatre," Times, June 8, 1889, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>"Novelty Theatre," I.S.D.N., June 15, 1889, p. 447.

<sup>3</sup>'Our Captious Critic,' "A Doll's House," I.S.D.N., June 29, 1889, p. 250.

The same critic censured the play because of its implausible outcome. Not even in Christiania (which the critic claimed was the most immoral city in all of Europe) would Nora leave her husband and children and set such a deplorable example to other wives. The Daily News, Daily Telegraph, and Saturday Review concur that Nora would not leave "simply because she finds that her husband is angry with her, and [is] inclined to take a selfish view of the dilemma when the exposure comes....no woman who ever breathed would do such a thing."<sup>1</sup> Clement Scott doubted that Ibsen understood women at all, and categorically denied Ibsenites' claims that Ibsen represents the most advanced comprehension of the female sex.<sup>2</sup> Several critics contested Nora's sudden change from frivolous plaything to philosopher and pointed out the illogic of Ibsen's theory of heredity:

According to Ibsen's theory, Nora has of necessity inherited the nature of a liar and a forger, it is hers by birth right. She is also a doll and cannot think deeply. Yet in one night she becomes a changed woman of set purpose, high ideal, and resolute will, with not the faintest trace of the hereditary taint which the author would have us believe is bred in her bone. From a frivolous feather-head who is lost in indulgence of the moment, she is supposed by a 'miracle' to be suddenly transformed into a cool-headed woman of the world, who lectures her husband, and lashes him with unsparing analysis, and generally holds forth upon heredity, marriage, and all kindred topics with as little reserve as one might expect from a latter-day saint. The author has set up his standard and then knocked it down again.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"The Drama. Henrik Ibsen in English," Daily News, June 8, 1889, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>C. S[cott], "The Playhouses," I.L.N., June 15, 1889, p. 774.

<sup>3</sup>"The Novelty," Stage, June 15, 1889, p. 11. s.a. 'Scrutator,' "Ibsen's 'Dolls' in Archer's 'Doll's House,'" Truth, June 13, 1889, p. 1127, and "Novelty Theatre," Times, June 8, 1889, p. 7.

Indeed, the possibility that Nora could commit a forgery in ignorance of the legal consequences is called into doubt,<sup>1</sup> as is the likelihood that a woman married for eight years could behave so childishy.

Similarly, the Saturday Review objected to Torvald's characterization, in which plausibility was sacrificed to Ibsen's all-important didactic purpose: in the last act, when he attempts to reconcile Nora, "Torvald is made to talk in a tone of selfishness which reminds one very much of Mr. Gilbert's satiric strain....no fairly intelligent man could talk in this way, whatever he might feel."<sup>2</sup>

Ibsen was accused of over-exaggeration and misunderstanding of the true relations between the sexes. For the critics of the Daily News, Daily Telegraph, Evening News and Post, I.L.N., I.S.D.N., Saturday Review, Spectator, Stage, Times, and Truth, A Doll's House failed because its fundamental implausibilities inspired disbelief.

The critics of the Stage, Spectator, Saturday Review, and I.S.D.N. not only criticized the accuracy of the Doll's House messages, but also called into question certain aspects of its moral teaching. The Spectator's critic concluded that,

...we regard it as a play that is, on the whole, misleading and mischievous in drift, especially as it teaches, if it teaches anything, that the way to improve life is to root up the good wheat that has begun grow, because there are tares intertwined with it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Daily News, op cit., and "'A Doll's House,'" Saturday Review, June 29, 1889, p.793.

<sup>2</sup>Saturday Review, Ibid, p. 793.

<sup>3</sup>Spectator, June 22, 1889, p. 854, rpt. Egan, p. 113. Prof. Robert Tener has identified R.H. Hutton as the author of this notice. Hutton, who characteristically took "the high moral line on literature" did not usually attend plays by 1889, and the presence of his review further reinforces the idea that this was a very special premiere.



Ibsen's cancellation of a marriage simply because it falls short of the romantic ideal was interpreted as a general principle in Ibsen's philosophy rather than a solution to one particular situation, and so he was denounced as a pessimist who rejected the possibility of reform in an "all or nothing" revolution of the sexes. For this and other moral reasons, some critics would have denied A Doll's House the right of theatrical performance. The Saturday Review's critic wondered whether or not there was still a Licenser of Plays, and if so, how scenes like the one between Nora and Dr. Rank could pass unscathed; furthermore, he requests that William Archer, if he must refurnish the marriage couch, at least move it out of the drawing-room (and off the stage).<sup>1</sup> The trade journal called the Stage asserts that "The stage is no place from which to lecture mixed audiences on purely medical subjects or on new ideas regarding religion and the marriage question" -- such knowledge should only be imparted in the study.<sup>2</sup> The Queen, a women's magazine, claimed to be in sympathy with Nora's rights to be treated as a human being, but objected to the extension of her rights to over-all emancipation:

...the result of preaching the doctrine that every woman ought to emancipate herself, and that she is to sacrifice all rather than permit herself to be merely a pretty plaything, and, in fact, the lesser man, is a somewhat dangerous one--  
     A rampant heresy, such as, if it spread,  
     Would make all women kick against their lords  
     Thro' all the world. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Saturday Review, op cit., p. 793.

<sup>2</sup>"The Novelty," Stage, June 14, 1889, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>"Between the Acts," Queen, June 15, 1889, p. 825, rpt. Egan, 1972, p. 106.

But non-Ibsenite critics did not often claim that A Doll's House would actually bring about changes in society, or cause women to follow Nora's example; Ibsen's crusading potential was usually only admitted by the pro-Ibsen movement. Most anti-Ibsen critics were confident that the decent-minded public would denounce Ibsen and his advocates, and that the only reason that the Novelty company escaped such a fate was because it played before a thoroughly unnatural audience.

By a non-Ibsenite audience this Dr. Rank would have been laughed at, and howled down would have been his reference to his disease and its causes, his fearful picture to Nora of the consequences of death by suicide, and his ghastly promise to send a card bearing a black cross.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Rank -- and in particular, the description of his hereditary affliction -- offended several critics. The Queen's reviewer could find "no good purpose" in bringing to light "evils which we unfortunately know to exist"; similarly, the Sunday Times acknowledged that "hereditary disease may be an important fact in actual life, but it is very disagreeable to have it rudely thrust before our eyes, and discussed in a love scene upon the stage."<sup>2</sup> Dr. Rank and the "foolish, fitful, conceited, selfish, and unloveable Nora" were, in Scott's view and in the opinion of several of his colleagues, two features of the play that "err against good taste, not to be readily forgiven."<sup>3</sup>

No critics acknowledged their own 'conversion' to Ibsenism by the 1889 Doll's House. Nevertheless, several non-Ibsenite critics did refer to the wave of conversions that took place -- presumably among members

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<sup>1</sup>"The Novelty," Era, June 15, 1889, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Queen, *op cit.*, rpt. Egan, 1972, p. 106; and "Plays and Players," Sunday Times, June 9, 1889, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>C. S[cott], "'A Doll's House,'" Theatre, July 1889, pp. 22, 21.

of the general public. The instantaneous emergence of the 'craze' was attributed to an outbreak of public curiosity in Ibsen, but its demise was expected to follow just as swiftly.

The Era, in an editorial on the dramatic craze of 1889, explains the origin of critical derision concerning the Ibsenite 'faddists':

A coterie of idle and excitable persons suddenly discover a suitable literary of dramatic 'lion.' The next step is to set him on a pedestal and worship him, the next to glorify themselves as worshippers, and the last to look down on outsiders as ignoramuses....The natural result is resistance on the part of professional critics, who object to having Ibsen, or anybody else, crammed down their throats....so much of the ridicule which has been showered on A Doll's House has been evoked by the absurdly respectful attitude of Ibsen's adorers....we cannot allow ourselves to be 'connoisseur-ed out of our senses,' and to be bullied by fanatics into the acceptance of rank absurdity.<sup>1</sup>

Had the interest originated from calm and methodical study of Ibsen's works in translation, the Era explained, the phenomenon might warrant consideration, but the outburst of faddism was destined to be fleeting, and thus unworthy of any notice.

Clement Scott was certain enough of the impending failure of A Doll's House that in his first night review he expressed a wish that the play could run for more than one week;<sup>2</sup> but on June 14, when the number of those "who desire to become better acquainted with Ibsen's

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<sup>1</sup>"Dramatic Crazes," leading article, Era, June 15, 1889, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>C. S[cott], Daily Telegraph, June 8, 1889, p. 3, rpt. Egan, 1972, pp.102-3. "Mr. William Archer has done his work so admirably, and those on the stage have so ably assisted him, that it would be a pity if their devotion to their 'master' were not recognised....The interest was so intense last night that a pin might have been heard to drop....We cannot but doubt that all who desire to become better acquainted with the author's new-fangled theories...will crowd the Novelty Theatre for the next few evenings."

new-fangled theories" brought about the extension of the run, Scott became abusive, and derided the play's success as a mere by-product of curiosity:

A play that is talked about will attract audiences to the most neglected theatre in London. We hear no more of 'the unfortunate little Novelty,' for the very good reason that the theatre is crowded nightly by audiences eager to see and discuss the new Ibsen philosophy in the form of a 'Doll's House'....

'The miracle, the miracle,' shouts the priggish Helmer, as the curtain falls on this grotesque and pessimistic play. 'What on earth is the miracle?'....'Why the miracle is...that people should stand up on stage and talk such rubbish!' But the 'Doll's House' is distinctly a curiosity, and, like all curiosities, a success.<sup>1</sup>

As if to deny A Doll's House its success and its enthusiasts, several critics thanked the Ibsenites for producing the play and destroying the myth that Ibsen is a writer worthy of attention. The craze, they were sure, would pass within a week of the premiere, and arose only because Londoners were prone to be 'crazed' by novelties, particularly of a theatrical sort. In 1886, there was the Shelley craze, brought about by the production of The Cenci; in 1887, Buffalo Billism was the fashion, in lieu of a craze in the legitimate theatre; in 1888 The Blot on the 'Scutcheon represented the culmination of Browningism. "The tardy importation of Ibsen in an English dress is a perfect godsend," argued the Saturday Review's critic, to those "noisy agitators" of social causes in search of a prophet.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>[C. Scott], "Dramatic and Musical," Daily Telegraph, June 14, 1889, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>"'A Doll's House,'" Saturday Review, June 29, 1889, pp. 792-3.

## -- Standard Responses of Sympathetic Playgoers

In an analysis of sympathetic playgoers' responses to A Doll's House, assumptions comparable to those made about the unsympathetic playgoers also apply. One presumes that the sympathetic playgoers had previous knowledge of Ibsen's plays -- in performance, in printed form, or by reputation -- and were sympathetic to Ibsen because they felt that he might have something positive to contribute to dramatic literature and the theatre. Passively or actively, they were of the opinion that, in principle, change was necessary for the English theatre if it was to improve (or regain) its status as a worthwhile, artistic institution. As with the unsympathetic playgoers, it is assumed that the sympathetic audience responded honestly insofar as their predilection permitted them, that they regarded the performance as a trial of Ibsen that was not fixed in its outcome, and that they believed that Ibsen should be tested in performance in order that they might clarify their feelings about his work.

Sympathetic playgoers were liable (by virtue of their predisposition) to find justification in A Doll's House for Ibsen's stylistic reforms or social conscience, but most recognized his potential effect on English playwrights and were excited by the prospects of reform. In general, sympathetic playgoers left the theatre with a strong feeling that they had witnessed something extraordinary -- but this does not mean that they completely understood the play, for in most cases the written responses of sympathetic playgoers are a mixture of awe, amazement, and disquietude. Rarely did playgoers leave the theatre

with the explicit knowledge that they had witnessed a work of dramatic genius. The sensitive mounting and performance helped sympathetic playgoers to recognize the high quality of the play, and aided the impression that A Doll's House was artistic and worthy of notice. The ultimate responses can be described as 'interest' and 'respect,' but these words are umbrella terms for many other responses, which include shock and confusion. The important distinction between sympathetic and nonsympathetic playgoers, however, is that the sympathetic spectators never dismissed the play outright, and never felt offense, boredom, or disbelief. Sometimes the interest or respect generated (or strengthened) by the performance resulted in new-found conviction of Ibsen's originality and importance, but this realization did not necessarily come about in the hours, days, or even months immediately following the performance.

Earlier in this chapter, there is a reference to the six out of twenty nine reviews that demonstrate that the critics had a reasonable understanding of A Doll's House and did not have reservations about it being performed. This falsely suggests that just under a quarter of London's reviewers were sympathetic Ibsenites. In fact, it represents the number of critics who were tolerant non-Ibsenites, rather than those who had a commitment either way. The critics of the Daily Chronicle, Gentleman's Magazine, Globe, Morning Post, P.M.G., and Theatre (R.K. Hervey) avoided expressing personal opinions of A Doll's House, and limit remarks to the plot, the interest aroused by the play, the fine production, and the acting. In the World, Archer offers "a few words, not of criticism, but of history" in recording the success

of the artists, and did not write a review of the play at all. In the Star, Walkley ultimately admitted that he was deeply affected by the play, and that he "came away gasping, with all one's neat little assortment of critical commonplaces blown to smithereens," but he still suggests that Ibsen might "take a lesson from that impenitent stage carpenter Sardou" to tighten up the first act.<sup>1</sup> Joseph Knight, in the Athenaeum, wrote strongly in the play's favour, but such Ibsenite sanctions of A Doll's House in 1889 did not preclude him from disapproving of other Ibsen plays in 1891.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, in the sympathetic reviews, despite silent, dubious, or non-committal Ibsenism, the classic scheme of response is apparent. The critic of the P.M.G., for example, perceived the "secret of Ibsen's strength as a satirist" in his innovative character delineation:

When he has a lesson to point he does not show us a pack of villains circulating around a phoenix of virtues; he shows us people distressingly respectable and reasonable, people we have all met, acting, even when they most come under his lash, upon motives humiliatingly familiar to the minds of ourselves.<sup>3</sup>

Walkley recognized the different techniques of Ibsen and the old school -- differences that were made clear in performance -- and appreciated the effect:

...it is not these externals, it is what we see through these externals, that makes 'A Doll's House' what it is for us -- a play differing not merely in degree, but wholly in kind from any play seen in England before last night. While absorbing us in the interest of the mere intrigue, the mere story-

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<sup>1</sup>'Spectator,' [A.B. Walkley], "'A Doll's House,'" Star, June 8, 1889, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>"A triumph is, at any rate, obtained. The whole is not only defensible, it is fine....The story thus absorbs and thrills, and the effect left upon the spectator is a sense of exaltation." Athenaeum, June 15, 1889, p. 770.

<sup>3</sup>"At 'The Doll's House' Last Night," P.M.G., June 8, 1889, p. 2.

telling part of the business, Ibsen drives into us and drives home in a way hitherto undreamt of in the playhouse the great LESSON OF MODERN SCIENCE ...Of course those who have read Ibsen knew all this before, but no mere reading could have prepared one for the tremendous force of the thing when put into flesh and blood on the stage.<sup>1</sup>

The Globe's critic recognized that "About the whole there is...a vitalising individuality which must enforce respect even where it fails to carry conviction."<sup>2</sup> The critic of the Daily Chronicle also noted that "both dialogue and incident are entirely free from the conventional."<sup>3</sup>

It was principally the sympathetic critics who remarked on Ibsen's technique. The sympathetic public (like the unsympathetic critics) was intrigued by the content and meaning of the play, with the 'Woman Question' predominating. Feminists like Edith Nesbit, Mona Caird, and Mrs. T.P. O'Connor admired the depiction of Nora, and regarded the play as a manifesto for female emancipation. The presence of a few such women in the theatre affected the whole audience and, according to Harley Granville Barker, enhanced the impact of the play's 'feminist' arguments.<sup>4</sup> Edith Lees, Olive Schreiner, Dolly Radford, Emma Brooke,

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<sup>1</sup>Star, op cit., p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>"A Doll's House," Globe, June 8, 1889, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>"Novelty Theatre," Daily Chronicle, June 8, 1889, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>See Cruse, 1938, pp. 127-8. Betty Friedan regards Nora as a role model for nineteenth and twentieth century women, and Elaine Hoffman Baruch describes A Doll's House as "the feminist play par excellence" because "from a feminist point of view, Nora is the new adventurer, a mythic hero for women to emulate, a rehabilitated Eve who has the courage to leave the garden in search of knowledge." ("Ibsen's Doll House -- a Myth for our Time," Yale Review, Spring 1980, pp. 374-87. s.a. Betty Friedan The Feminine Mystique, London: Victor Gollancz, 1963, pp. 82-3.) In the nineteenth century, the attachment of the 'discussion scene' was sufficiently revolutionary, and Nora's departure was enough of a break from the stage tradition that A Doll's House was perceived as a pro-feminist piece. Nevertheless, modern feminists of many factions might interpret Nora's motives and actions as a typical depiction of



and Eleanor Marx Aveling met outside the theatre after a performance "breathless with excitement." For these women, A Doll's House was a resolution for debate:

We were restive and almost savage in our arguments. What did it mean?...Was it life or death for women?...Was it joy or sorrow for men? That a woman should demand her own emancipation and leave her husband and children in order to get it, savoured less of sacrifice than sorcery.<sup>5</sup>

Other sympathetic spectators were intrigued by the play, but the exact basis of their interest is unknown. W.B. Yeats was introduced to Ibsen by the 1889 Doll's House production. He disliked the negation of poetry that the 'naturalistic' dialogue necessitated, but could neither embrace nor reject the play, and took several years to consider his dilemma.<sup>6</sup> Florence Bell attended with her daughter, Gertrude, who wrote: "We were very much struck by it. It is extremely good in some places and extremely bad in others, ludicrously and crushingly bad. But

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cooperation with conventional society and its patriarchal ideals. Nora enacts humanist feminist principles, but her identification of her oppressors in Torvald, her father, and her family contradicts socialist feminists' identification of the capitalist system as the oppressing force. Nor does Nora's disillusionment with Torvald (her romantic ideal) bring her greater awareness of her oppressors in accordance with radical feminist philosophy, for she neither blames men as a class for exploiting women, nor rejects heterosexual marriage. Nora goes into the world at large with another romantic illusion just as unrealistic as her love ideal, for without money, skills, or experience she believes that she can educate and liberate herself to become "a human being."

<sup>5</sup>Edith Lees, Stories and Essays (London, 1914), rpt. in MacKenzie, 1977, p. 168.

<sup>6</sup>"I was divided in mind, I hated the play; what was it but Carolus Duran, Bastien-Lepage, Huxley and Tyndall all over again? I resented being invited to admire dialogue so close to modern educated speech that music and style were impossible....As time passed Ibsen became in my eyes the chosen author of very clever young journalists, who, condemned to their treadmill of abstraction, hated music and style; and yet neither I nor my generation could escape him because, though we and he had not the same friends, we had the same enemies. I bought his collected works in Mr. Archer's translation out of my thirty shillings a week and carried them to and fro upon my journeys..." (Yeats, 1953, pp. 279-80.)

above all it is original, one had seen nothing like it before."<sup>1</sup> Mary Gladstone Drew found the play "a curious piece, not suited to drama, but full of interest and suggestion." Lord Rowton, who sat next to Drew and Lady Stepney, was "deeply impressed." William Gladstone, too, is said to have been converted to women's suffrage by A Doll's House, but he gave little indication of that in the Commons.<sup>2</sup>

### Some Converts, and the Aftermath

Many people in London society were agitated by Ibsen in June 1889. At a party at Durham House, Elizabeth Robins discovered that Lady Seton's guests were "all agog about Ibsen, asking one another who was this 'strange' (in every sense) dramatist that nobody had ever heard of before."<sup>3</sup> For her own part, Robins was deeply affected by the performance, which provided her, and Marion Lea, with long-term inspiration.<sup>4</sup> Lea was immediately seized by a desire to perform Ibsen, though almost two years passed before she found the opportunity.<sup>5</sup> A Doll's House scored many individual victories over artists, playgoers, and critics

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<sup>1</sup>Burgoyne, 1958, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Gladstone, 1930, p. 410.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Robins, Both Sides of the Curtain (London: Heinemann, 1940), p. 195.

<sup>4</sup>"The unstagey effect of the whole play...made it, to eyes that first saw it in '89, less like a play than like a personal meeting -- with people and issues that seized us and held us, and wouldn't let us go....To go to that play once was to be compelled to go again....And this Doll's House, with its little-known actors and its poverty-struck setting, was not only the most thrilling, it was the most satisfyingly done modern play I had every seen." (Robins, 1928, pp. 11-13.)

<sup>5</sup>Robins, 1940, p. 197.

who were irrevocably changed by the Charringtons' production. These victories were vital for the subsequent development of the Ibsenite movement.

Aside from the tremendous achievement of putting Ibsen before the public for three weeks, generating a considerable sensation in playgoing circles and establishing his name as "a force to be reckoned with,"<sup>1</sup> A Doll's House also did important service for Ibsen behind the scenes. The network of actors, critics, and producers who were to be responsible for the major Ibsen successes of the 90s emerged when individuals stepped forward and announced their allegiance. With this enlarged camp of supporters a real engagement between 'Ancients' and 'Moderns' seemed more feasible. Ibsenites were, of course, proud of the Charringtons' success and were hopeful that the 'craze' might be long-lasting, with other productions soon to follow, but they were reticent about proclaiming the beginning of a dramatic revolution or claiming Ibsen's controversiality as definitive proof of enduring public interest in him. Non-Ibsenites insisted that the memory of Ibsen would pass as quickly as the fad, and despite Louise Chandler

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<sup>1</sup>"Two years ago [1888] the name of Henrik Ibsen was known only to a very limited circle, who had but scant hope of even seeing his dramas performed on the English Stage. To-day his name is widely familiar, and even his adversaries, even those critics to whom his method and manner are most distasteful, are willing to allow that he is a force to be reckoned with. The courageous and careful production of 'The Doll's House' last season unchained a storm of discussion such as few dramatists have produced." (L.N. Parker's dedicatory letter in Rosmersholm, London and Sydney: Griffith, Farren, 1890.)

Moulton's remark that A Doll's House was "not to be seen and forgotten as one reads the last novel from Mudie's," doubts and disappointment filtered into the Ibsenite ranks.<sup>1</sup>

William Archer was heartily demoralized after the play closed, and resumed his old cry that "Ibsen on the English stage is impossible" --at least for the time being -- because if A Doll's House could not bring about an instantaneous revolution, nothing else from Ibsen's workshop would:

...what are the chances that Ibsen's modern plays will ever take a permanent place on the English stage? They are not great, it seems to me. The success of A Doll's House will naturally encourage Ibsen's admirers to further experiments in the same direction -- interesting and instructive experiments I have no doubt....But none of these plays presents the double attraction that has made the success of A Doll's House -- the distinct plea for female emancipation which appeals to the thinking public, and the overwhelming part for an actress of genius which attracts the ordinary playgoer. The other plays, I cannot but foresee, will be in a measure antiquated before the great public is ripe for a thorough appreciation of them.<sup>2</sup>

As time passed, Archer became more convinced that A Doll's House had been a failure. Shaw discovered that by January 1890, Archer "had gradually convinced himself that the play ran...for about three nights amid a hail of dead cats, sixteen-a-shilling eggs, brickbats & gingerbeer bottles, and that on the fourth night there was no audience." Archer did not lose faith in Ibsen as a result of the

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<sup>1</sup>"London Letter," Boston Herald, July 7, 1889. (From the cutting files in the Houghton Library Theatre Collection, rpt. Paulus, 1959, p. 58.)

<sup>2</sup>William Archer, "Ibsen and English Criticism," Fortnightly Review, July 1, 1889, p. 37, rpt. Egan, 1972, pp. 122-3.

Novelty production (quite the contrary), but as Shaw discerned, "the more Ibsen-mad he gets (he has never been the same since June last) the more he declares that Ibsen is bound to be a dismal failure."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Archer suffered overmuch from the browbeating he received in the anti-Ibsen press. Perhaps he was disappointed that Ibsen did not have an immediate effect on theatrical tastes and practices. Perhaps the 'craze' lost its impetus too soon and too completely. Or, even though the public aspect of Ibsen and Ibsenism had been permanently changed, perhaps the departure of the Charringtons to Australia seemed to end all of Archer's hopes for further sensitive productions of Ibsen's most challenging social plays.

#### "Ghosts" and "The Pillars of Society"

Other productions were soon contemplated, but in accordance with Archer's prediction, neither the public nor the acting profession were quite ready for them. Ghosts was proposed in 1889 and again the following year, but only The Pillars of Society was staged.

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<sup>1</sup>G.B. Shaw to Charles Charrington, January 28, 1890, in Laurence, 1965, pp. 238, and 239.

In 1889, two separate managements considered Ghosts,<sup>1</sup> but gains made by the Doll's House were not pervasive enough to supply a sympathetic professional cast and as yet there was no organization equipped to carry out a private performance. Mrs. Oscar Beringer, who was determined to capitalize on the Ibsen mania while it lasted, scheduled a matinee benefit for her daughter, Vera (of Little Lord Fauntleroy fame), on July 17. Genevieve Ward, who had refused to cooperate with Beringer if she produced Ghosts, agreed to play Lona Hessel in The Pillars of Society.

[Beringer] had actually dared to ask Miss Ward's support for the incredible project of producing Ghosts. Miss Ward had rated Mrs. Beringer soundly. Ghosts wasn't a play, it was 'a piece of moral vivisection -- an exhibition fit only for an audience of doctors and prostitutes' -- a word that took Miss Ward's courage to pronounce in those days.

All the same Miss Ward was too loyally of the old school not to regard a player's Benefit as an honourable institution which called for the support of The Profession....Miss Ward wondered whether she herself might conceivably make something less absurd than Ibsen had of the principal woman.<sup>2</sup>

W.H. Vernon, who created the first English Bernick in 1880, agreed to play the role again at the benefit. Although Vernon and Ward also played together in John Gabriel Borkman in 1897, they were not Ibsen devotees. Elizabeth Robins, however, who took the small role of Martha in the 1889 Pillars, continued to act in and direct Ibsen plays for the

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<sup>1</sup>See "Theatrical Gossip," Era, June 29, 1889, p. 8. "The Ibsen craze continues. Ghosts is to be done at a private performance [as it] is considered rather too strong for the sanction of the Lord Chamberlain for a public performance." The sponsors of this venture are unknown, and since the announcement was limited to the Era it is possible that it was merely a rumour. Beringer's proposal for Ghosts is verified by Elizabeth Robins. The Era might have misunderstood Beringer's plans for the play and announced an already abandoned proposal; if this is so, the Era had not associated a Ghosts proposal with Vera Beringer's benefit, since the Pillars matinee was announced in the same item.

<sup>2</sup>Robins, 1940, p. 198.

next decade. Although the acting and staging were adequate and were admired by the press, Beringer had no sympathy with the aims of the Ibsenites, and simply used the production to exploit public interest in Ibsen for personal gain.

Despite a cramped, shallow stage, minimal rehearsals, and a translation more suited to reading than speaking,<sup>1</sup> the Pillars drew a good crowd, and the Opera Comique was full to its capacity of 862 persons.<sup>2</sup> Even though anti-Ibsen critics insisted that the play would not be liked by a non-Ibsenite audience, the Observer noted that "It was obviously studied with interest by others besides those ardent devotees who gravely speak of Ibsen's stagework as a revelation, of his socialist arguments as a gospel, and of himself as the greatest dramatist of the century."<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly, many spectators attended because it was Vera Beringer's benefit, but most came to see Ibsen. It was not, therefore, a typical premiere audience. The press reported little about the audience's behaviour except that it was, for the most part, quiet and attentive. Some disparaging post-curtain remarks are recorded in the Referee, and the P.M.G. reports the antics of a particularly disruptive non-Ibsenite critic, but this seems to have been an isolated incident.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Archer complained at length about these factors in his World review. Although the text was taken from his published translation, he did not have time to alter it for the stage, nor was he involved with rehearsals. ("The Theatre," July 24, 1889, pp. 12-13.)

<sup>2</sup>The Globe reports the attendance of Messrs. Palmer and Jarratt (American managers), Mrs. Bandman-Palmer, J.H. McCarthy, Brandon Thomas, Gertrude Kingston, Emily Faithfull, the Kendals, Miss Bealby, Miss Cowen, and H.B. Tree. ("Plays and Players," July 18, 1889, p. 6.)

<sup>3</sup>"At the Play," Observer, July 21, 1889, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>See Referee, July 21, 1889, p. 3, rpt. Egan, 1972, p. 130; and "Dramatic Criticism as She is Wrote...", P.M.G., July 19, 1889, p. 2.

Generally, the non-Ibsenite press found the Pillars easier to understand than A Doll's House (i.e. there was no debate over the ethics of the play), but because it seemed to lack incident and dramatic action, the audience's interest flagged at certain times, particularly toward the end. Unlike A Doll's House, then, the Pillars attracted comment on matters of style and construction rather than content and meaning. Several non-Ibsenite critics complained that the structure is of an inferior sort, unworthy of the English stage, and most critics deplored the long-winded, didactic dialogue while admiring the characterizations, basic plot, and tragic potential of the drama. Compared to most contemporary plays, it is extremely dependent on the dialogue; consequently, although the basic story line was recognizable (or even old hat), the Pillars seemed excessively verbose compared to melodrama.<sup>1</sup> Few critics perceived that "though its dialogue is prolix, it is at the same time of no ordinary kind. Every line is pointed and to the purpose, and...at once arrests the spectator's attention."<sup>2</sup>

Archer acknowledged the shortcomings of the production, but insisted that they could be easily remedied:

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<sup>1</sup>One playgoer wrote to Punch explaining how, when the Royal Victoria Hall was in its heyday, melodramas with precisely the same situation as the Pillars were common (a falsely sanctimonious burgher sends his son to sea in a coffin ship). Despite several differences between the burgher's and Bernick's repentance, and the latter's indifference to the sex of his victims, the correspondent wrote that "there was no distinct difference between the version of the North [the Opera Comique] and the version of the South [the Victoria]. At the theatre south of the Thames I remember the dialogue was crisp and to the point. We had plenty of action, and, so to speak, soon 'came to the 'osses.' North of the Thames, the dialogue was hopelessly dull; so I did not feel inclined to laugh at the Opera Comique Theatre -- I only wanted to sleep!" 'One Who has had Enough of Ibsen,' "A Pill for 'the Pillars,'" Punch, July 27, 1889, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>"Between the Acts," Queen, July 27, 1889, p. 140.



Give me a deep stage; let me build the bright and airy scene according to the poet's directions, taking care to secure the different effects of light which ought to lend so much variety to the picture; let me revise the text carefully, restoring (yes, restoring) a good many passages omitted on Wednesday; let me choose a company, not of any unheard-of strength, but justly adapted to the task assigned it (I should hasten to secure several of the Opera Comique artists); [and] give me a month for rehearsals, so that everything may go with smoothness and precision.<sup>1</sup>

The critics of the Athenaeum (Joseph Knight), Globe, Morning Post, P.M.G., Theatre (R.K. Hervey), and Queen all wrote in favour of the Pillars production as an admirable, entertaining, theatrical work. Knight suggested that it might find its way to an evening run at a more suitable time in the season, although his colleagues insisted that it might not be to the taste of the 'average playgoer.' The P.M.G. was the most optimistic of all the pro-Ibsen papers, exhibiting a degree of optimism unusual for 1889:

There is a great future for Ibsen in England. The great Norwegian is now fairly naturalized on English soil. It was made plain to all intelligent eyes by 'The Doll's House,' at the Novelty; yesterday's performance of the 'Pillars of Society' at the Opera Comique has clinched certainty. Critics may fume and playwrights shrug their shoulders, but, for good or evil, the London stage is destined to see a great deal more of Henrik Ibsen, and the benefit matinee of Miss Vera Beringer will not be, by a long way, the last performance of the 'Pillars of Society.'<sup>2</sup>

As it happened, this most actable, palatable, and inoffensive social play was not performed again in London until 1901, when it was revived by the Stage Society for two performances.

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<sup>1</sup>World, *op cit.* Archer's remark about the cuts is probably dependable: he was observed by the Evening News and Post critic "following the course of 'Pillars of Society' diligently with the aid of a manuscript in a brown paper cover." ("Who's Who?," July 18, 1889, p. 2.)

<sup>2</sup>"Ibsen at the Opera Comique," P.M.G., July 18, 1889, p. 2.

For a summertime matinee performed under scratch conditions, the Pillars was fortunate to receive so much attention in the press. No doubt, residual interest from A Doll's House helped, but the play was sufficiently well known through the Camelot edition that several non-Ibsenite critics dispensed with detailed plot summaries because their readers were already familiar with the story. The audience was also painfully familiar with the after-pieces on the programme. In a masterstroke of insensitivity, Beringer enlisted Madge Kendal to recite G.R. Sims' "Ostler Joe" (a poem about a man's utter constancy to his errant wife).<sup>1</sup> The effect of this recitation on the audience aptly illustrates the conflict of the old and new styles of drama. Many years later, Shaw recalled the incident:

We all felt very serious indeed when the curtain fell. Enter, suddenly, Mrs Kendal, newly arrived, charmingly dressed, beaming, fluttering with popularity and condescension, conscious that she was doing a kind thing to Mrs Beringer, and going to console and delight a houseful of people bored to death with gloomy Norwegian nonsense. She walked round the house at the back of the circle...an entrancing vision, and presently appeared on the stage and recited -- oh, so cleverly -- Ostler Joe! She felt, I think, that she was producing a tremendous effect; but she did not know what sort of effect, and does not, probably, to this day. It was as if some goodnatured pagan, coming into a cathedral at high mass, and seeing a number of people looking very grave, had with the best intentions tried to cheer them up with comic song.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>George R. Sims, The Dagonet Reciter and Reader (London: Chatto and Windus, 1888), pp. 16-19, and The Dagonet and Other Poems (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1903), pp. 198-205.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Ada Rehan, August 2, 1904, in Laurence, 1972, p. 440. s.a.  
 G.B. Shaw, London Music in 1888-9... (London: Constable, 1937), p. 171.

Nevertheless, according to the St. James's reviewer, Kendal "evidently moved some of her hearers more deeply than they had been moved by the whole four acts of 'the Pillars of Society.'"<sup>1</sup> Following this mishap, Antoinette Sterling sang "The Three Fishers."

Almost a year later, and concurrent with the Théâtre Libre production, H.L. Braekstad (the bookseller who introduced Gosse to Ibsen's Digte) proposed to present Ghosts at a matinee benefit for an 'Ibsen Fund.' The backers of the scheme are unknown, although Harrington Baily was the man who originally contacted Elizabeth Robins and secured her agreement to play Mrs. Alving. Some of Archer's suggestions for casting seem as brash and as confident as the suggestion that Tree should be approached about lending the Haymarket.

On my way home I have been thinking over a possible cast for Ghosts. What do you say to Brandon Thomas for Manders? I understand he is an admirer of Ibsen. Failing him, how would Macklin do? And for Regina, failing Miss Filippi, I have three suggestions: Miss Marion Lea, Miss Florence West, Miss Gertrude Kingston....Hermann Vezin would be an ideal Engstrand if he would do it.

Tree would probably not let you have the Haymarket stage for adequate rehearsals. Could you get any other [for rehearsals]? I daresay the Novelty (already sacred to Ibsen) could be had for a trifle, and would do until the thing was somehow in shape.<sup>2</sup>

Tree agreed to lend his theatre and scenery as long as the producers paid the basic expenses, and as long as they permitted him to play the youthful but syphilitic Oswald. Archer laughed outright with horror and amusement when he heard of Tree's conditions, but for the sake of the project he seemed to acquiesce.<sup>3</sup> Rashly, Robins also approached

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<sup>1</sup>"Another Ibsen Play," St. James's Magazine, July 18, 1889, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from William Archer to Elizabeth Robins, June 10, 1890. Robins Collection, Fales Library.

<sup>3</sup>Robins, 1940, pp. 257-64.

Fred Terry about playing Oswald; Terry subsequently consulted Tree about the part, unaware of Tree's claims on it, and caused the Haymarket offer to be withdrawn. Braekstad's financial backers were less supportive than he had hoped, and another theatre could not be afforded, so the project was scrapped.

In July 1890, Jacob Grein, a City clerk and expatriate Dutchman, made formal announcements in the press that in September or October he planned to open a free theatre (on Antoine's model) at the Novelty.<sup>1</sup> This scheme too was scrapped, although it reappeared in an altered form as the Independent Theatre of London in March 1891, when Ghosts was finally presented.

#### Readings and Lectures

Tree's beneficent impulse and the Ibsenites' desire to put Ibsen on stage were both assuaged when Mrs. Erving Winslow arrived from America with a blessing from 'the Master' in her pocket and at least three of his plays at the tip of her tongue.<sup>2</sup> So, although Ibsenites did not see Ibsen on stage, they at least heard him for two and a half

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<sup>1</sup>See J.T. Grein, letter to St. James's Gazette, July 21, 1890, pp. 5-6. s.a. Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup>The Era reported the contents of a letter from Ibsen to Winslow: "Munich, April 6th, 1890. Very Honoured Lady, -- it was a great and deeply-felt pleasure to me to learn some particulars of the readings you have already given of my dramatic works, as well as of the extended tour which you propose to undertake. For your active and unwearied endeavours to bring my writings before the public, in which you have already been so successful, I beg you to accept my warmest and heartiest thanks, whilst I wish you, at the same time, a great deal of good fortune in the artistic tour which you are planning. With the best and most courteous greetings, I have the honour to sign myself, Your very devoted, HENRIK IBSEN." ("Mrs. Erving Winslow's Reading," June 21, 1890, p. 7.)

unbroken hours in the Haymarket Theatre, on June 19. Winslow's reading of An Enemy of the People attracted a select, but fairly large audience which included William Gladstone, then leader of the opposition.

According to Archer, the recitation was a failure because, despite Winslow's skill as a reader, the audience was unaccustomed to listening to plays -- particularly ones that depended so much on stage picture -- and even with savage cutting the experience was very wearying.

Mrs. Winslow spoke it with spirit (what she did speak of it), but with no working-up of the excitement, no climax, no culmination. The scenes in which she made most impression on the audience were those in which, not without violence to Ibsen's intention, she turned on the pathetic stop. Mrs. Stockmann's appeal to her husband at the end of the second act is not in reality the heartrending affair Mrs. Winslow made of it; but she did it powerfully, and the audience, grateful for an oasis of sentiment in the stony wilderness of ideas, did not fail to respond. But it was only a short respite. Soon we were deep in drainage again, municipal and moral; and Mr. Gladstone, evidently thinking he could get plenty of that sort of thing at Westminster, withdrew to finish his afternoon nap in comfort.<sup>1</sup>

Archer complained that the humour in the play was completely overlooked, and though with a good cast and sufficient rehearsal it could entertain an English audience, hearing An Enemy of the People read aloud could easily pall even the most ardent Ibsenite, and two and a half uninterrupted hours in a hot theatre, as Walkley commented, "was not exactly beer and skittles."<sup>2</sup> The Observer's and Era's critics agreed with Archer, but the St. James's Gazette reported that "Mrs. Winslow read this play so as to give it surpassing interest, and it is

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "The Theatre. An Ibsen Reading," World, June 25, 1890, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 28, and "Haymarket Theatre. An Afternoon Reading of Ibsen," Star, June 20, 1890, p. 2.

a thousand pities that Mr. Gladstone did not sit it out."<sup>1</sup> Winslow also gave readings of A Doll's House on July 8, and The Lady from the Sea on July 11, both at Steinway Hall. The Era included a brief notice of the July 8 recitation, at which it seems that Winslow's performance was warmly appreciated.<sup>2</sup>

Two lectures on Ibsen were given during the summer of 1890. On June 22, J.H. Muirhead spoke on "Ibsen's Plays and Problems," under the auspices of the London Ethical Society. This Sunday lecture society, for which Philip Wicksteed was also a frequent speaker, was established 'to help people to see the moral life as an expression of freedom in the light of modern moral codes.'<sup>3</sup>

On the 18th of July, Bernard Shaw lectured to an audience of Fabian anti-idealists at the St. James Restaurant. The lecture was the last in a series of talks on socialism and literature that featured Sydney Oliver on Zola, William Morris on Gothic Architecture, Sergius Stepniak on Tolstoi, Tchernytchevsky, and the Russian School, and Hubert Bland on socialist novels. Edward Pease, who was at Shaw's lecture, remarked that the evening was possibly "the high-water mark in Fabian lectures."

The minutes, which rarely stray beyond bare facts, record that 'the paper was a long one,' nearer two hours than one...and add: 'The meeting was a very large one and the lecture was well received.'...the effect on the packed

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<sup>1</sup>"A Reading from Ibsen," St. James's Gazette, June 20, 1890, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>The Era's review is the only known notice of the event ("Ibsen at Steinway Hall," July 12, 1890, p. 7), although the Observer included an announcement of both Steinway Hall readings ("At the Play," June 29, 1890, p. 3). Franc falsely states in the appendix to her book that readings from The Pillars of Society and An Enemy of the People took place at the "Haymarket and other London halls." (Franc, 1919.)

<sup>3</sup>See Fourth Annual Report, p. 8, and First Annual Report, pp. 2-3 of the London Ethical Society.

audience was overwhelming. It was 'briefly discussed' by a number of speakers, but they seemed as out of place as a debate after an oratorio.<sup>1</sup>

The lecture was later developed into The Quintessence of Ibsenism, but fragments of the original text survive in the British Library.<sup>2</sup> The talk elicited criticism from Herbert Burrows and Annie Besant, whose conceptions of socialism differed from Shaw's.<sup>3</sup> William Morris had acknowledged socialists' identification with Ibsen in June 1889,<sup>4</sup> but despite Shaw's explicit insistence that it was socialism that embraced Ibsen (and not the other way around), the sequence was confused for evermore as a result of his lecture. The Daily Chronicle, thinking that Ibsen had just embraced Fabian socialism, despatched its Munich

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<sup>1</sup>Edward R. Pease, The History of the Fabian Society (London: A.C. Fifield, 1916), pp. 94-5.

<sup>2</sup>B.L. Add. MS 50661, rpt. Wisenthal, 1979.

<sup>3</sup>Besant "protested strongly against doctrines which cut at the root of everything she holds dear," and Burrows protested at the meeting as well as in the press about the "Socialism of the Sty" represented in Shaw's rendition of "the gospel of egotistic selfishness" (see Justice, July 26, 1890, p. 2), but Ian Britain views their responses as indicative of political quarrels between leftist factions rather than differences of opinion on literary analysis. Disagreement over the accuracy of Shaw's interpretation of Ibsen was, according to Britain, on "largely, perhaps predominantly, ethical lines. Burrows's adverse reactions...to Shaw's questioning of the idealist morality, may in part have been politically motivated: as a member of the Social Democratic Federation, he could have been indulging in a bit of Fabian-baiting. The general tenor of his reply to Shaw does not rule out the possibility that he was attempting to score a point over a rival political faction at the same time as he was debating a crucial moral issue. With Besant, Clarke, and Blatchford, however, there could have been no comparable 'political' motive. It is true that both Besant and Clarke were soon to leave the Fabian Society -- though, in Besant's case at least, this was partly because she was alienated by the very type of morality which was reflected in Shaw's Ibsen lecture....The reactions to Ibsen among British socialists, especially Fabians, in the 1890s were more varied than some contemporary authorities might lead us at first to believe." (I.M. Britain, "Bernard Shaw, Ibsen, and the Ethics of English Socialism," Victorian Studies, Vol. 21, 1978, pp. 398-9.)

<sup>4</sup>'W.M.' [William Morris], "Notes on News," Commonweal, June 22, 1889, p. 193.

correspondent to interview Ibsen about the matter. In the interview, Ibsen denied being a member of the Social Democratic Party (or any other party), he denied having studied "the extensive literature dealing with the different socialistic systems," and he expressed surprise that he and social democrats had, by entirely different methods, arrived at the same conclusions. In the published version, however, the reporter attenuated Ibsen's remarks, giving the impression that Ibsen claimed complete ignorance of the socialist movement and its tenets.<sup>1</sup>

A vindication of the ideas in the talk (also by Shaw, of course) appeared in the Star,<sup>2</sup> and on July 19, Shaw's unflagging confidence in the essay was asserted again when he read the paper to Archer (who had been on the continent the previous week) and Walkley -- neither of whom was very impressed. Archer later wrote:

A.B.W. confesses after a brief but desperate effort to adjust his mind to your novel terminology, he gave it up in despair, and fell to considering the prospects of the root-crops. For my part, I was seasoned beforehand to your freakish irrationalism....I was thus in a position, while recognising [sic] the cuteness and ingenuity of your analyses of individual plays, to scoff at the jargon in which you had chosen to expose the ground-work of your theory -- a darkening of counsel...by sheer metaphysical verbalism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The interview appeared as "Ibsen and Socialism," Daily Chronicle, August 13, 1890, p. 3. Ibsen's letter is in Ibsen, 1908, pp. 215-16. s.a.: Shaw's letter to Archer, August 17, 1890, in Laurence, 1972, pp. 157-9; H.L. Braekstad's letter "Ibsen and Socialism," Daily Chronicle, August 28, 1890, p. 5; Daily Chronicle, July 19, 1890, p.5.; and Wisenthal, 1979, pp. 87-8.

<sup>2</sup>"'Good' Men Go Wrong. Bernard Shaw Inveighs Against the Duties of the Orthodox," Star, July 19, 1890, p. 2. Authorship is ascribed by Wisenthal (1979, footnote, p. 9).

<sup>3</sup>William Archer, "'The Quintessence of Ibsenism.' An Open letter to Geroge Bernard Shaw," New Review, November 1891, p. 463.



The paper was read a third time, on October 18, before the Church and Stage Guild. "Church and Stage were both of them, of course, represented at the meeting -- the ecclesiastical element rather predominating; and Mr. Bernard Shaw, in the most sweet-natured of fashions, said the most shocking and hazardous things about both."<sup>1</sup>

### More Publications

For almost a year after the Pillars matinee, Ibsenites' activity centred on publishing. In the August issue of Nineteenth Century, Walter Frewen Lord published a fifteen-page article describing the plots of all Ibsen's plays from The Pretenders to The Lady from the Sea, with rudimentary biographical notes on the playwright. The essay is factual rather than argumentative, but Lord's certainty about Ibsen's importance is clearly conveyed.<sup>2</sup> In the same month, the Contemporary Review published Philip Wicksteed's essay on Peer Gynt --this was probably a transcript of one of his lectures at Chelsea Town Hall in 1888 (see Chapter One). In his detailed critical analysis of the play, which includes many passages of dialogue, Wicksteed provided the first English commentary on "the Norwegian Faust" since 1873.

In November or December 1889, Fisher Unwin released a limited edition of A Doll's House to commemorate the Charringtons' production. Known as the "Novelty Theatre edition," it was the first printing of Archer's translation. It was expensively produced, with plates of

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<sup>1</sup>"The Stage. Stage Notes," Academy, October 25, 1890, p. 371.

<sup>2</sup>Walter F. Lord, "The Works of Henrik Ibsen," Nineteenth Century, August 1889, p. 256.

photographs and a portrait of Ibsen, and its 115 copies circulated only among those people in the thick of Ibsenism or closely involved with the Novelty production.<sup>1</sup> At about the same time, the first English edition of Rosmersholm was published (three years after the original text). The translator, Louis Napoleon Parker, was a prolific writer of plays and pageants for stages in London, the provinces, and New York; his brief alliance with Ibsenism was sincere, but unexpected. Parker admired the work of Alma Murray (Beatrice in the Shelley Society's Cenci) and her associates on the alternative theatre scene, and welcomed the inevitable reforms in conventional theatre that Ibsen presaged. His dedicatory letter states: "The public which has greeted 'The Profligate' with a shout of approval cannot turn with indifference from Ibsen. For this reason...I have ventured, country-mouse though I be, to do my bit of gnawing at the net which still envelops the lion."<sup>2</sup>

Alma Murray held the option on this translation, but when Shaw began to arrange a production of Rosmersholm in 1890-91 he rejected Parker's

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<sup>1</sup>A copy was sent to Ibsen, and he was deeply gratified by the gift. He wrote to William Archer from Munich, on November 3, 1889: "The beautiful and valuable edition of A Doll's House reached me in good condition....I have the book always lying on my table, and it is greatly admired by all who see it and are able to appreciate works of art in the typographical line. I do not deny being proud that such a work of mine should have appeared in such a garb." (Ibsen, 1908, p. 427.) A copy is on deposit in the British Library.

<sup>2</sup>L.N. Parker (trans.) Rosmersholm, 1890.

version in favour of Charles Archer's more colloquial text.<sup>1</sup> In 1893, Parker's translation was licensed for a performance in Brighton, with Elizabeth Robins as Rebecca West (see Chapter Four).

Also concurrent with the Novelty Doll's House and Rosmersholm, Fisher Unwin published the first British translation of Ibsen's latest drama, The Lady from the Sea (translated by Eleanor Marx Aveling and introduced by Edmund Gosse) only a year after the first Scandinavian edition.<sup>2</sup> Although Rosmersholm attracted little critical comment, The Lady from the Sea was reviewed in the Scots Observer, and by C.H. Herford in the Academy. Herford admired both plays, but thought the translations adequate yet flawed. The Scots Observer was not particularly impressed by Ibsen or his latest play, calling it "Nothing more than a romantic paraphrase of that interesting symposium on marriage which, under the title of The Doll's House seduced the serious person from the debating society to the theatre."<sup>3</sup>

In March 1890, Griffith Farren reprinted Lord's translations of A Doll's House and Ghosts, but this was eclipsed by the appearance, two months earlier, of the first edition of The Prose Dramas of Henrik Ibsen, edited by William Archer and published by Walter Scott. Archer's

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<sup>1</sup>The Athenaeum reports that more than one translation of Rosmersholm was forthcoming. ("Dramatic Gossip," November 2, 1889, p. 606.) Presumably the other translation was by Charles Archer. Archer's version was complete by October, 1890 (c.f. Chapter Three) but was not published until Volume V of the Prose Dramas was released in the spring of 1891.

<sup>2</sup>The Harvard Monthly of November/December 1889 contains the very first English translation, which was by G.R. Carpenter, from the German translation by Professor Julius Hoffory. (Referred to in "Ibsen and his Translators," Nation, January 23, 1890, p. 68.)

<sup>3</sup>"Another Doll's House," Scots Observer, January 4, 1890, p. 185. s.a. C.H. Herford, "The Last Two Plays of Ibsen," Academy, January 18, 1890, pp. 38-9, rpt. Egan, 1972, pp. 143-5.

zeal and Scott's confidence are reflected by this early publication of a definitive edition of the prose plays. Years later, Charles Archer commented on the rationale behind the series:

Naturally enough it was the 'social dramas' that mainly attracted translators, as more easily dealt with, and more likely to appeal to the public, than the earlier plays from saga and history. But [William] Archer felt that the time was now ripe for a complete English version of the poet's works, including all the mature prose dramas at the least....and Archer was plunged into the work of translation, revision, and editing which was to occupy so great a share of his time and thought for the next sixteen years. Since Ibsen could grant no copyright, early publication was essential in order to forestall possible competition.<sup>1</sup>

The first two volumes each contained two well known plays (The Pillars of Society and A Doll's House, and Ghosts and An Enemy of the People), and one entirely new translation (The League of Youth, and The Wild Duck). Scott was probably as brave as he was opportunistic when he launched the series, for though some of the plays were well known and liable to sell copies, The Wild Duck was never well known or liked in England in the nineteenth century, and The League of Youth was lauded even less. Volume Three, released in July or August, attracted only a few dedicated Ibsenites, although it contained the first (and only) nineteenth century editions of Ibsen's historical and saga dramas (Lady Inger of Østraat, The Vikings at Helgeland, and The Pretenders). The Emperor and Galilean, which was published as Volume Four in November, was not destined to be popular either. A fifth volume containing recent social plays appeared in 1891. Some of Archer's translations also appeared in Lovell's Prose Dramas of Henrik Ibsen (edited for an American readership by Edmund Gosse), an individual

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Archer, 1931, pp. 169-70.

edition published by Scribner's in New York, but the Scott set of Prose Dramas remained unrivalled in the United Kingdom. Aside from Brand, Peer Gynt, and the plays written after the 1890-91 Scott edition appeared, no more Ibsen plays were translated into English during the nineteenth century. The Feast at Solhaug was published in Boston in 1911, but English readers waited for the rest of Ibsen's early works until 1970, when Volume One of the Oxford Ibsen appeared.

Compared to the massive amount of scholarship that went into the Prose Dramas, the journalistic work of 1890 was fairly trifling. In a description of all known Ibsen-related activity this work should, nonetheless, be mentioned. In January, Walter Besant's sequel to A Doll's House appeared in the English Illustrated Magazine.<sup>1</sup> Although most English Ibsenites treated the piece as too lowly for their attention, Shaw regarded it "as being of enormous importance as a representative middle class evangelical verdict on the play." In the next month's issue of Time, Shaw published a continuation (in dialogue)

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Besant, "The Doll's House -- and After," English Illustrated Magazine, 1889-90, pp. 315-25. A German translation appeared under the title Nora und was aus dem Puppenheim ward (Hamburg: 1890). In Besant's sequel, Nora returns to her old town twenty years after she slammed the door on her family and her marriage. In the interim, she has become a wealthy author while her husband and one of her sons have slipped into alcoholic dissipation. Her other son forges the signature of his employer (Krogstad), while her daughter is thrown over for propriety's sake by her lover (Krogstad's son) when he is forced to recognize the taint on her family name. The sequel ends with Nora's discovery that her daughter has committed suicide.

to Besant's sequel.<sup>1</sup> Even before it appeared in print, Shaw knew that the Ibsenites would not be any more kindly disposed to his sequel than they had been to Besant's, but he remained adamant about its worth.

The worst of it is that my sequel is declared to be beneath the level even of Besant's -- to be slosh, rubbish, dull dreary Philistine stuff &c &c &c. It is 'not even comic' they say. They are all wrong: it is first rate; but the dramatic form hides its merit from them: they want more description to explain how Nora said the things to Krogstad. Besides, they have not taken in Besant's sequel, upon which mine depends wholly. These criticisms are of course confined to those who have seen the proofs; but they are tolerably unanimous, Mrs. Aveling having led them off, and Archer agreeing with her to the point of begging me for the sake of my reputation not to publish it.<sup>2</sup>

Havelock Ellis' The New Spirit, which contains sections on five fashionable authors (Diderot, Heine, Whitman, Tolstoi, and Ibsen), appeared in the spring of 1890.<sup>3</sup> Ellis' biographical sketch of Ibsen

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<sup>1</sup>G.B. Shaw, "Still After the Doll's House. A Sequel to Mr. Walter Besant's Sequel to Henrik Ibsen's Play," Time, February 1890, pp. 197-208. In this sequel, Nora sits down for a serious discussion with Krogstad, enlightening him about the rampant hypocrisy in Christine, his children, and everyone else in the town. Nora points out that Krogstad has become Christine's doll, and urges him to leave, as she did. Krogstad sees himself as the slave of marriage but fears that his departure would be regarded as mistreatment of Christine -- he could not be a hero like Nora.

<sup>2</sup>Letter to Charrington, January 28, 1890, in Laurence, 1965, p. 239. Another sequel was inspired by Besant's version. Ednah D. Cheney was disappointed by Besant's interpretation of Nora, and wrote a version in which Nora and Torvald are reconciled in a conventional 'fourth act.' Excerpts of their 'diaries' are used to chronicle Nora's new career as a nurse and her attainment of self-discovery through service. After she nurses Torvald through a bout of cholera, he realizes the errors in their marriage and attempts to engineer the 'miracle' that could bring Nora back. By filling her bookcase with works by Plato, Goethe, Shakespeare, Raphael, and Michelangelo, and by providing her with her own bank account, a 'true marriage' is made possible, and the chronicle ends happily, but stereotypically. E.D. Cheney, Nora's Return. A Sequel to 'The Doll's House' of Henry [sic] Ibsen (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1890).

<sup>3</sup>(London: George Bell). A third edition with a New preface published by Walter Scott in 1893.

and description of his plays (from The Vikings at Helgeland to The Lady from the Sea) is culled from his Camelot preface and contributes little to Ibsenite scholarship, though it is noteworthy as an official British recognition of Ibsen's membership in the international elite of modernist writers.

More important for Ibsenism, Henrik Jaeger's Life of Henrik Ibsen (1888) was translated into English by Clara Bell in 1890, with verse translations by Edmund Gosse.<sup>1</sup> The publication of an English edition of The Life of Henrik Ibsen is remarkable for several reasons: it was unusual in late Victorian England for biographies of foreign authors to appear, particularly during the subject's lifetime and while she or he enjoyed good health; Ibsen was sixty two years old but he had been well known in England for only sixteen months; and, curiosity about Ibsen's life had been allayed by numerous essays and articles that included biographical information.<sup>2</sup> For Ibsenites like C.H. Herford, however, the translation of the biography seemed "like the fulfilment of a natural law."<sup>3</sup> It presented, for the first time, details of Ibsen's early life, suggestions about the origins of some of his ideas, characters, and plays, and it filled in the faintly sketched picture of his sojourn outside Norway. Herford hoped that, along with Volume

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<sup>1</sup>Published by Heinemann. Another translation, entitled Henrik Ibsen, 1828-88, by William Morton Payne, was published by A.C. McClung in Chicago in 1890.

<sup>2</sup>e.g. "Modern Men. Henrik Ibsen," Scots Observer, May 11, 1889, pp. 687-8; Walter F. Lord, "The Works of Henrik Ibsen," op cit.; and the introduction to the Camelot edition and its reappearance in The New Spirit.

<sup>3</sup>C.H. Herford, Academy, November 8, 1890, p. 414.

Three of the Prose Dramas, the biography might help dissolve anti-Ibsen prejudices since they presented information about Ibsen's formative years, and not just about the social propagandist of A Doll's House.

...it will, we trust, dissipate many illusions which have hitherto held their ground without difficulty in circles which regard it as a mark of provincialism to write in a tongue which they do not understand; and also in those other circles, partially coincident with the first, which tolerate the most insidious handling of forbidden subjects 'for art's sake,' but cannot repress their disgust when these are treated, with the most austere dignity and reserve, by the satirist or the reformer.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, the biography failed to have this effect on the critic of the Saturday Review. He found the book "confused in arrangement" and "childish in criticism," but most importantly, he questioned the exercise of glorifying such a minor literary figure in this manner.<sup>2</sup> The pro-Ibsen reviewers found the book interesting and stimulating, but neither the Athenaeum's, Academy's, nor Speaker's reviewers were satisfied that Ibsen's personality had been adequately communicated to the reader. Herford believed that the lack of colour and variety in minutiae of detail about Ibsen's life obscured the characteristics of the man. Walkley was critical of Jaeger's attempt to account for Ibsen's personality by pseudo-scientific analysis of circumstances, and complained that as a Scandinavian he was too close to his subject.

On the whole...Jaeger is sane enough; he sees his subject steadily, and he sees it whole. The one drawback (for English readers) is that he sees it at somewhat too close quarters. Being himself a Scandinavian, Ibsen's environment, Ibsen's temperament, Ibsen's ethos, are familiar to him. To us aliens these things are unfamiliar, and we want them explained from our point of view.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>ibid, p. 414.

<sup>2</sup>"Ibsenia," Saturday Review, December 27, 1890, p. 747.

<sup>3</sup>A.B. Walkley, "A Literary Causerie," Speaker, January 24, 1891, p. 107.



The biography sold well and remained in print throughout the 90s.

### Summary

By making a public nuisance of themselves in 1889 and 1890, Ibsenites succeeded in making Ibsen's name widely known and in providing means by which people could explore what the name represented. During its three-week run, A Doll's House attracted large audiences, establishing support in a cross-section of the population and demonstrating to non-Ibsenites that a high quality performance could make Ibsenism as prevalent and contentious in London as it had been in Copenhagen in 1880. The Novelty production mobilized pro- and anti-Ibsen forces alike, but despite predictions of an early demise of the 'craze,' the Theatre still complained of the "Ibsen Cult" in December 1889. Whether or not Ibsen would ever be fully accepted was only part of the issue: even minor Ibsen successes exposed some British theatre-goers to the New Drama and inevitably facilitated reform. Numerous translations, including the Prose Dramas, kept Ibsen's name forward and promoted discussion of a wide selection of his plays. Critical publications, lectures, public readings, and stage projects appealed to a select group, but also demonstrate serious interest among 'ordinary' playgoers, theatrical artists, producers, and publishers as well as critics and intellectuals.

The deluge of information about Ibsen and translations of so many of his plays conclusively show that 'the age of Ibsen' had finally arrived in London, after years of gestation in Scandinavia, Germany,

America, and most recently in France. During the autumn of 1890, more productions plans were formulated -- these projects, which came to fruition in 1891, are dealt with in the following chapters.

## SECTION II: THE IBSEN YEAR: 1891

## CHAPTER THREE

## FORUMS FOR DEBATE

*For one thing, at least, we have to thank Henrik Ibsen in England to-day as in Norway a dozen years ago. He has set people talking and thinking about the drama as they have not talked or thought about it for years....all this is well; and if the brief passing of Ibsen is to make our intellectual public turn once more to the theatre -- even though they only turn to it to abuse it -- his exceeding bitter medicine will not have been tasted in vain. (Era, 1891)<sup>1</sup>*

Relevant Changes in the Theatre Since 1880, and the Effect of Ibsen

In the interval between the controversial Doll's House production of 1889 and the renewal of the Ibsen debate in 1891, the public's and press's attitudes toward the drama changed enough to alter the climate into which new Ibsenite projects were tendered. In the haunts of literary and cultured people as well as at formal and informal meetings of playgoing enthusiasts of all classes, the latest West End successes were discussed, and there seems to have been a widespread revival of interest in theatrical matters.<sup>2</sup> In reaction to this, many periodicals increased the space allotted to theatrical reviews and news. Since

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<sup>1</sup>"Theatrical Gossip," Era, May 2, 1891, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>See H.A. Kennedy, "The Drama of the Moment," Nineteenth Century, August 1891, pp. 258-74. Kennedy considers some of the recent tendencies in dramatic art and playgoers' interest.

1880, but especially since 1891, after Archer's frequent accusations of backwardness and dramatic philistinism, London's progressive playgoers became interested in the continental theatre, in the new playwrights and their realism and naturalism, and in up-to-date alternatives to the Adelphi-style melodrama and the French well-made play that had monopolized English playbills up until that time. In 1891, they were shown a serious, literary alternative in A Doll's House, Rosmersholm, Ghosts, The Lady from the Sea, and Hedda Gabler.<sup>1</sup> Ibsen's audience was reclaimed from the ranks of ex-playgoers who were wearied and dissatisfied by traditional and native drama, and from all sorts of playgoers curious about the assertions that great dramatic literature was being created in their own times.

Despite Ibsen's predominantly bad press -- or perhaps because of it -- Londoners, for the first time, bought printed plays by a contemporary foreign writer. For the first time, lengthy articles on the theatre's progress, development, and popularity appeared frequently in prestigious review periodicals. For the first time, relatively unknown actors made overnight reputations based on performances in plays of quality. And, for the first time, playgoers flocked to see

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<sup>1</sup>In the autumn of 1890, Tree began to set aside Monday nights "for the production of plays 'calculated to delight and charm the few' but ill suited to the grosser tastes of vast audiences." As Dickinson remarked in 1917, "this was the first sign of a disposition to adapt the profession stage for the new movements in playwriting and pointed the way to a more flexible organization of the stage." (Thomas H. Dickinson, The Contemporary Drama of England, Boston: Little, Brown, 1917, pp. 137-8.) With the exception of Archer, the critics were not impressed by the first offering, Beau Austin (by Stevenson and Henley), but as the Fortnightly's critic (George Moore?) observed, they went to the theatre with their Scribner and Sardou-ian ideals firmly in tow. (Fortnightly Review, December 1890, p. 930.)

untried plays in matinee conditions, and an unlicensed play in a back-street, third-rate playhouse. The 'Ibsen craze' that briefly stung London in 1889 was renewed -- with a vengeance -- and while detractors frequently pronounced its demise, they were repeatedly disappointed by announcements of yet more forthcoming productions. Interest was not only fanned by the unprecedentedly persistent commentary that Ibsen was accorded by the press, or by word of mouth in pubs, clubs, and drawing rooms, but also by the mystique of Ibsen himself, an exiled Norwegian bourgeois who dared to write controversial plays in an obscure, 'unreadable' language, and whose forty years of labour seemed to burst upon London without warning. Many people became thoroughly fed up with the controversy -- but even more refused to stop talking.

If the present state of affairs continues, it will soon be absolutely necessary for someone to bring in a bill establishing a Close Time for Ibsen. It may easily be said that sufficient for the day is the Ibsen thereof, but we really must think of posterity. If we talk Ibsen threadbare, what of our poor descendants? What will they have to squabble over? Let us not be so greedy. Let the Ibsen satire be emasculated, and the Ibsen parody be squelched. To this glorious end I beg leave to propose 'A Bill for the Better Regulation of Ibsen.' And it is further proposed that this Bill shall come into operation immediately after I have said all I want to say on the subject. Private mem. -- This will probably be about the year 2015.<sup>1</sup>

From 1889 onwards, Ibsen was widely upheld as an example to English playwrights. Like it or not, they were encouraged to extract the essence of Ibsen's appeal (with or without also adopting his 'indiscretions,' depending on the advocate's critical stance), and to use his innovations to inspire the second English dramatic renaissance.

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<sup>1</sup>"Playgoers' Notes," Playgoers' Review, May 15, 1891, p. 173.

To many, however, the Scandinavian drama seemed to discredit Victorian playwriting achievements up to 1891, and its advent was resented and distrusted by Pinero and others who thought that the Ibsenites were denying that the native drama had made any progress at all in the previous thirty years.<sup>1</sup> Many theatrical artists resented Ibsen's takeover and perceived him as a foreign usurper with treasonous English agents who were blind to the merits of English drama and to the accomplishments of the indigenous theatre. But despite the affront of Ibsen's detractors and their superior access to the press, Ibsenites caused many Londoners to reassess their theatrical attitudes and tastes in the first six months of 1891.<sup>2</sup> Public approval was not fully

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<sup>1</sup>"A few years ago the native authors were working with a distinct and sound aim with every prospect of popularising a rational, observant, homegrown play. Then came the Scandinavian drama, held up by the critics as the Perfect drama and used by them as a means of discrediting native produce. Just for the present everything is knocked askew; the English dramatist has little influence, and the public, urged to witness A Doll's House, patronises the Empire Theatre of Varieties." Letter from Pinero to Archer, October 25, 1891 (in M. Thompson, "William Archer: Dramatic Critic. 1856-1924," Theatre Notebook, Vol. 11, no. 1, October-December, 1956, pp. 6-11.)

<sup>2</sup>In Punch, Mrs. Grundy and her daughters reveal the alterations in popular attitudes toward the drama, and how the advent of Ibsen altered perceptions about the conventional drama even among those playgoers who never attended serious, literary plays:

THEN. Scene -- Dining-Room in Mrs. Grundy's House. The Misses Grundy and their Mother discovered at Luncheon.

Eldest Miss G. Oh, Mamma, do take us to see Formosa at Drury Lane!

Mrs. Grundy. My dear! Why, it's absolutely shocking! All the papers are ringing with the impropriety! Couldn't possibly go!

Second Miss G. But Mama dear, the Boat-Race Scene is so excellent. We might sit at the back of the box, and put our fingers in our ears when you signalled to us.

Mrs. Grundy. Well, as you say, the Boat-Race Scene is excellent, and as for impropriety, we must ignore it.

(Exeunt to get places for Drury Lane.)

NOW. Scene as before, Time and situation as before, Company enters as before.

Eldest Miss G. Oh, Mother darling, do take us to see Formosa at Drury Lane!

secured for many decades, but during 1891 certain pillars of respectability and conservatism acknowledged their appreciation, and their influence is significant. The Quarterly Review, for example, declared Ibsen "a phenomenon worthy of study" in the serious, academic manner that scholars accord all Great Authors.<sup>3</sup> The Globe upheld the Quarterly's approach:

An attempt has been made of late, in some influential quarters, to impress the British public with the belief that Ibsen's social dramas are as 'contemptible' as they are 'disgraceful'. That Ibsen is not the sort of writer to be pooh-poohed in this ignorant facile fashion is illustrated by the fact that the Quarterly Review, the venerable representative of conservatism in art as well as in politics, thinks it worth while to devote an elaborate article to the very dramas which have been so glibly condemned. Moreover, the article shows that the writer (unlike most of those who write about Ibsen) has read and studied the dramatist's works, not contenting himself with what can be picked up in the newspapers or the theatre. And it is notable, further, that the article is couched in a thoroughly appreciative and judicious strain, being written with a calmness and a balance which most critics of the Norwegian dramatist may well envy.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps it was Archer's style that inspired certain other critics to reassess their expectations of the theatre and to consider their own integrity when pronouncing judgments on new plays. George Moore

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Mrs. Grundy. Certainly. I hear the Boat-Race Scene beats the record.

Second Miss G. It is simply magnificent, and the dialogue is so interesting. Twenty years ago they said it was improper! As Ibsen would observe, 'Only fancy that!'

Mrs. Grundy. Did they? Well, as you say, the Boat-Race Scene is excellent; and as for the impropriety, -- in these days of Ghosts, The Pillars of Society, and Dancing Girls, we haven't time to notice it!

(Exeunt to get places for Drury Lane.)

("The Drama Then and Now," Punch, June 6, 1891, p. 167.)

<sup>3</sup>See Quarterly Review, April-June 1891, pp. 305-19. Ostensibly a review of four volumes of plays and Jaeger's biography, the article is composed of commentary on the plays and on Ibsen. The author is judicious, but not universally appreciative, especially of Hedda Gabler.

<sup>4</sup>"Plays and Players," Globe, April 23, 1891, p. 6.

identified this new group of able, uncorrupt journalists and describes them as the "clamorous opposition" dressed "in seedy suits of black." At West End openings, they could be found "talking violently about Ibsen. These are the prominent members of the Playgoers Club, and they all write in the second rate evening papers."<sup>1</sup>

### Ibsen and the Playgoers' Club

The gravity of the reforms, the earnestness of audiences, and the acuity of the Ibsen debate are reflected by the Playgoers' Club. When the Club was founded in 1884, playgoing enthusiasts met in coffeehouses to discuss the latest productions of Irving and Bancroft.<sup>2</sup> By 1891, proceedings had become much more formal and subscription-paying members met weekly to hear papers by recognized authorities on acting, management, and genre, or to hear well-known figures read plays or debate their merits.

On February 10, a large crowd gathered to hear Edward Aveling read Ghosts. The first act went by without incident, "except that one gentleman apparently taking the play for a speech, cried 'hear, hear' at intervals."<sup>3</sup> Concerned that he might not get through the entire play, Aveling gave only a summary of the events of the second act, then passed on to the third. The subsequent discussion was lively, but the

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<sup>1</sup>George Moore, "Our Dramatic Critics," P.M.G., September 9, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>The first meeting consisted of an address by Henry Arthur Jones on "The Modern Drama." (Doris Arthur Jones, The Life and Letters of Henry Arthur Jones, London: Victor Gollancz, 1930, p. 9.) Subsequent meetings were less formal.

<sup>3</sup>"Chit Chat," Stage, February 12, 1891, p. 11.



Ibsenites struggled against the majority: even Eleanor Marx Aveling and Bernard Shaw, two "seasoned socialist mob orators," found themselves "much in the position of a pair of terriers dropped into a pit of rats."<sup>1</sup> They countered the arguments of Jerome K. Jerome, Cecil Raleigh, W. Davenport Adams, and Clement Scott (whose opinions were represented in a letter). J.T. Grein used the occasion to announce that Ghosts would be performed by an independent theatre in a few weeks time, so no one could isolate issues of theoretical debate from the practical situation. Discussion touched on ancillary topics like the propriety of certain subjects as the motives for stage plays, and women's attendance at British and continental theatres. The presence of women at the meeting was regarded as beneficial because it affected the temperance of speakers' remarks, though the ban on women's membership was reaffirmed.<sup>2</sup>

The debate was so popular, with what Shaw called "an assemblage of barloafing front-row-of-the-pit-on-a-first-night-dilettanti" swelling the crowd, that it was resumed on February 17 and 23. On the third occasion, larger quarters had to be found: "The fact is," reports the People, "the current debate on the Norwegian writer is exciting so much interest that the ordinary meeting-place of the club is too small for those who desire to be present at the discussion."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Shaw to Charrington, March 30, 1890. (Laurence, 1965, p. 288.)

<sup>2</sup>See "Dramatic and Musical," Daily Telegraph, February 20, 1891, p. 3; "The Actor," People, February 15, 1891, p. 4; and "The Playgoers' Club and Ibsen," Playgoers' Review, March 15, 1891, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup>"The Actor," People, February 22, 1891, p. 5.

The third meeting was meant to focus on Rosmersholm, which had been performed earlier the same day, but the speakers had difficulty limiting their remarks to that play. Jerome K. Jerome was in the chair, and various actors (including the cast of Rosmersholm) and critics (including Austin Fryers, Bernard Shaw, and J.T. Grein) attended, as well as Eleanor Marx Aveling, Edward Aveling, and H.L. Braekstad. The decorum of the first two meetings broke down slightly at the third. Florence Farr's performance as Rebecca was uncomplimentarily referred to by an orator *unaware of her presence at the meeting*. The People's correspondent thought that, considering the indelicate subject of Ghosts (frankly outlined by one speaker), the chairman ought to have called the meeting to order more than once, in deference to the women present.<sup>1</sup>

At the April 27 meeting, the Club invited Wilton Jones to speak about parody and burlesque. Ibsen spoofs had been longed for all season, so when Jones followed his lecture with a reading of "One Day in a Woman's Life" (a satire on naturalistic plays, especially Ibsen's), it was welcomed.<sup>2</sup> On May 4, Edward Aveling gave a reading of The Lady from the Sea, anticipating the forthcoming production. He performed well considering he was almost voiceless from speaking on the Eight Hours Bill in a London park the previous day. A brief but lively discussion ensued, with the Chairman (Davenport Adams) speaking in support of The Lady from the Sea's conformity to the English tastes for a romantic story, 'proper' subject, light relief, multi-layered

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<sup>1</sup>"The Actors," People, March 1, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Printed in Playgoers' Review, March 15, 1891, pp. 143-5. See Chapter Five.

dialogue, and depiction of a moral idea.<sup>1</sup> Cecil Raleigh responded, and "knocked all the romance out of the story."<sup>2</sup> Austin Fryers' disrespectful comments prompted Eleanor Marx Aveling to speak in the play's defense. Leonard Outram spoke in appreciation of Aveling's reading and of Ibsen. Nearly all the cast of the forthcoming production were present, along with Lady Greville, Mrs. Berens, Mrs. Armbruster, Frances Ivor, Minnie Bell, Cecil Raleigh, Henry Murray, Rudolph Blind, H.L. Braekstad, and J.T. Grein.<sup>3</sup>

On December 6, Tree addressed the Club on the subject of "Some Interesting Fallacies of the Modern Stage."<sup>4</sup> Among the fallacies that he discussed was the idea that independent theatres would free the stage from the tyranny of actor-managers. Much of the lecture was devoted to Ibsen and Maeterlinck. Tree regarded Ibsenism as a passing fad without importance, except, perhaps, for its effect on native drama:

What I maintain is, that the work of such writers as Ibsen will not hold a permanent place upon our stage, for, interesting as it undoubtedly is, it can only be a transient phase, bearing the same relation to home-grown art as a crinoline does to the human form, as the tail of the tadpole does to the frog. It cannot be expected to take its place as a permanent and native growth. It serves, however, as an admirable manure for the future, a dung-hill from which many a fair flower of the drama may bloom.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"The Lady from the Sea Lecture, by Dr. Aveling," Stage, May 7, 1891, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>"Playgoers' Club," Playgoers' Review, May 15, 1891, p. 178.

<sup>3</sup>"Plays and Players," Globe, May 7, 1891, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>H.B. Tree, Some Interesting Fallacies of the Modern Stage. An address delivered to the Playgoers' Club at St. James's Hall on Sunday, 6th December, 1891 (London: Heinemann, 1892). Rpt. in Thoughts and Afterthoughts (London: 1913).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, pp. 26-7.

Ibsen's drama had a double effect on Tree: he seemed to admire the power and brutality with which Ibsen portrayed situations, but he recoiled from the stench of "the drama of perpetual night"; his eyes were "riveted with wonderment and awe" but the object of his attentions was "the crawling brood which the want of this pitiless magician stirred from the muddy depths, from the foetid pools, of a sunless, joyless, and ulcerous society."<sup>1</sup> Tree left his listeners somewhat confused about his true feelings, for the lecture was "so punctuated with fun and pungent humour...that one hardly [knew] whether he was admiring or condemning the Maeterlinck and Ibsen whom he alternately crowned and jumped on."<sup>2</sup> The evening was a success, however, and a polite discussion followed.

In addition to its meetings, the Playgoers' Club also disseminated information and interest in Ibsen through its monthly journal. The Playgoers' Review: The Organ of the Playgoers' Club was a threepenny publication edited by J.T. Grein and distributed to the Club's members from January until May 1891, when it folded. It contains articles on the theatre, with notes, reviews, and letters about theatrical developments and productions, and information about the Playgoers' Club activities. The Ibsen 'boom' of the early months of 1891 and the Club's participation in it are carefully recorded in the Review, along with many secondary figures' opinions. Later on, the Club became more

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Lady Maud Tree, "Herbert and I," in Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Some Memories of Him and His Art, ed. Max Beerbohm (London: Hutchinson, 1920), p. 72. McCarthy's review of the lecture suggests that Tree was tolerant of Maeterlinck but saw nothing but ugliness in Ibsen's power. "Pages on Plays," Gentleman's Magazine, January 1892, p. 103.

catholic in its interests, but in 1891, Ibsen was the vogue and it was his plays that attracted people to meetings. The Ibsen debates established the Club as a forum where theatre critics, actors, producers, and ordinary playgoers could discuss new ideas in a fair and reasonably amicable spirit. Membership quickly doubled to 200 in 1892, and by 1895 it stood at 800.<sup>1</sup>

On December 7, Gosse gave a lecture on "Ibsen and his Critics" at the London Institution. An author's function, he argued, was to inspire emotional response by manipulation of the technical and stylistic aspects of art. Beyond the Ibsenite enclave, the tendency was to react to what Ibsen was saying rather than how he said it, and to confront the people who advocated his plays rather than debating the actual artistic and social issues at stake.

### Public Interest

Ibsen seemed to provide a combination of elements that inspired truly widespread controversy, beyond the confines of a club membership; he had a small group of zealous supporters who wrote weekly in the best journals; he had a large group of detractors who read the best journals but who wrote for the popular dailies; his plays were preceded by a reputation for infamy and scandal when they were read or seen in Europe; and his ideas were sufficiently remote from the person of

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<sup>1</sup> Tormorham, ' "The Playgoers' Club," Players, March 15, 1892, p. 183, and "Echoes from the Green Room," Theatre, March 1, 1895, p. 191.

average education that authoritative explanations were desired --explanations that always differed, spawning additional controversy from dissension.

Despite the dearth of London productions of Ibsen after July 1889 (when the topic 'Ibsenism' was relegated to play-discussers rather than the more populous category of playgoers), a lively controversy over his methods and meanings preceded even the first of the half dozen Ibsen productions in 1891. Clearly, Ibsen had not been forgotten, and widespread debate resumed immediately after new productions were formally announced. Ibsenites were conscious of the inevitable opposition, and greeted the announcements with a sort of glad wariness and defensive belligerence. Even before the first performance, Walkley complained that "The heated controversy about Ibsen is becoming a little tiresome. Merely to utter his name in a mixed company [of Ibsenite and anti-Ibsen critics] is as seismic in its effects as to whistle 'Croppies Lie Down' at Donnybrook Fair."<sup>1</sup> In the company of Ibsenites, or especially the "Inner Ibsen Brotherhood," as Punch called the noisiest of the playwright's admirers, "not to know Ibsen would be proof positive of your being in the outer darkness of ignorance, and in need, however unworthy, of the grace of Ibsenitish enlightenment."<sup>2</sup> Long lists of the plays' defects were produced, arming those non-Ibsenites who looked forward to the productions with an attitude of sporting gamesmanship as well as those who valued an opportunity to shout down Ibsen, once and for all. Those who believed that Ibsenism

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<sup>1</sup>A.B. Walkley, "A Literary Causerie," Speaker, January 24, 1891, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup>"Their Ibsen-Dixit,'" Punch, February 14, 1891, p. 75.

was only a passing fad that would soon be routed from everywhere except, perhaps, lunatic sanatoria and unreachable bookshelves, determined to enjoy it while it lasted. It was prophesied that "one-night's performance, with a house half full, would exhaust Ibsen's public, and quite exhaust the patience of those who know not Ibsen." Far from fearing the consequences of an Ibsen outbreak among the moral majority he shielded, Clement Scott welcomed a few productions: "the best cure for the Ibsen rabies is inoculation."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Dramatic and Musical," Daily Telegraph, February 27, 1891, p. 3.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE IBSENITES

Not very long ago, after studying two critiques on the performance of Ghosts at the Royalty Theatre, I laid aside my journals and tried to picture to myself the effect that reading them in succession would produce on a man who had never before heard of the play they referred to. It was a puzzling task, and I arrived at the deliberate conclusion that he would be driven to believe either that no such play existed, or that one or both of critics in question had written of it without having seen it. Anything, indeed, but the brain-shattering thesis that a play could exist to which two such opposed descriptions would apply.

(H.A. Kennedy, August 1891)<sup>1</sup>

#### Ibsenite Leadership

The people who promoted Ibsen in 1891 were not a unified alliance of dedicated faddists, as many critics outside 'the fold' portrayed them. There was no solid body of intellectuals and artists who conspired to honour Ibsen, nor was activity planned in consultation or organized to create the greatest possible gain. Where alliances occurred at all they were loose and transitorily utilitarian. Some of the projects were one-off experimental ventures by people whose

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<sup>1</sup>Nineteenth Century Review, op. cit., p. 258.



connection with 'recognized' or 'known' Ibsenites was non-existent, while several others were planned only because of the possibility of personal gain.

The anti-Ibsen press did consistently depict Ibsenites as an evangelical religious cult with a systematized hierarchy of leadership. Ibsen, at the apex of the hierarchy, was commonly referred to as "the Master" -- a god-like figure remote from England and exiled from Norway, or a sort of wandering prophet whose divinations appeared at two-yearly intervals. In popular phraseology, William Archer was the universal primate of Ibsenism who faithfully transformed the divinations from their original language into the vernacular; as the facilitator of all Ibsenism he was known as the arch-high (or "Archer-high") priest of the cult. Controversy over rival translations of Hedda Gabler by Gosse and Archer temporarily evoked friction between them, to the great delight of non-Ibsenites, who gleefully speculated on the outcome of the competition for arch-priest.

Other translators, whose output was minimal or rendered unremarkable by the absence of a reinforcing voice in the press, were usually not accredited with specific roles in the hierarchy. Henrietta Frances Lord, who published translations of A Doll's House (Nora) in 1882 and Ghosts in 1888, and reprints of both plays in 1890, was completely obscure. Louis Napoleon Parker, whose translation of Rosmersholm in 1890 was the only published edition of the work available for more than a year, was also ignored. Frances E. Archer (translator of The Wild Duck) and her brother-in-law Charles (who translated Lady Inger of Østraat for the Prose Dramas, whose translation of Rosmersholm appeared

in 1891, and who continued to collaborate on Peer Gynt) were completely disregarded by the hierarchy-makers, and their existence was virtually forgotten in lieu of giving recognition to William.

Next in rank to William Archer were the socialists Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx Aveling, prominent at Ibsen lectures in 1891, and closely involved with the May production of Eleanor's translation of The Lady from the Sea. Truth portrayed Aveling as a candidate for the top position, along with Archer and Gosse, but although he was a very visible exponent of Ibsenism at Playgoers' Club meetings, he did not have the influence or over-all importance of Archer. Other Ibsenites grouped with the Avelings are Jacob Grein, the enterprising producer of Ghosts, founder of the Independent Theatre Society of London, and editor of the Playgoers' Review; J.H. McCarthy, a long-time advocate of the New Drama, recently very active in the periodical press, and a potential producer of Ibsen; A.B. Walkley, critic for the Star and Speaker; and the actresses who organized performances of Ibsen (e.g. Elizabeth Robins, Marion Lea, Rose Mellor, and Florence Farr) dating from the time of their performances.

The creators of this mythic hierarchy only roughly outlined the next order, but Oswald Crawford, Austin Fryers, Henry James, George Moore, Havelock Ellis, and the Daily Graphic critic could easily be included.<sup>1</sup> Bernard Shaw, at this time still writing music criticism,

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick Fenn has been identified as the Daily Graphic critic ca. 1890-1900, but because his name was never associated with Ibsenism I hesitate to positively name him as the pro-Ibsen critic of this paper. (c.f. Appendix C. and Christopher Kent, "Periodical Critics of Drama, Music and Art...", Victorian Periodicals Review, Vol. 13, no. 1, 1980, p. 39.

took every opportunity to include Ibsen's name in his reviews and to write about drama instead of music, but until the The Quintessence of Ibsenism was published in October he was not distinguished as an exponent of Ibsenism to a much greater extent than Graham Wallas, Annie Besant, and other Fabians.<sup>1</sup> Other orders of Ibsenites were vaguely assigned to all the unknown playgoers who approvingly attended the performances, to those who read and admired the plays, and to all the leftover socialists, aesthetes, Whistlerites, Wagnerites, and Browningites who ever planted a sunflower or hummed a leit-motif.

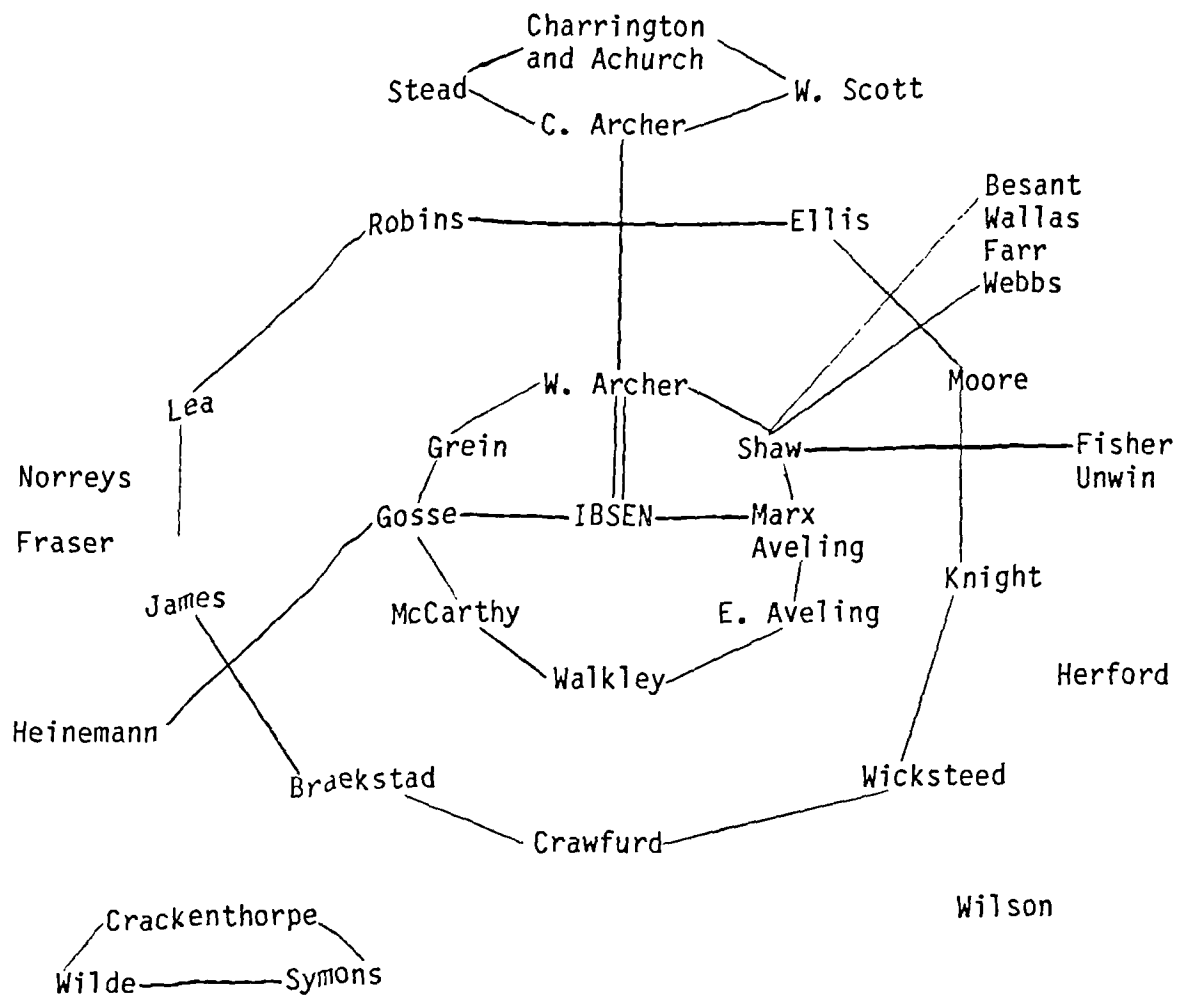
For several reasons, however, the anti-Ibsen hierarchy of Ibsenite organizations and responsibility is suspect. Firstly, this hierarchical 'chain of being' was defined by persons with prejudicial viewpoints in order to ridicule and belittle new literature that they neither understood nor appreciated, but which they feared. By depicting Ibsenism as a 'religion,' the anti-Ibsen press mocked the plays' intentions and importance and demeaned their pretensions and scope. Secondly, their insistence that the Ibsen movement was of mere momentary significance and their attempts to reinforce the public's image of Ibsenites as a faddish clique, belittled Ibsenism by likening an odd-looking Norwegian to God, and a dour, bickering Scotsman to St. Peter, the Holy Pope, or the Archbishop of Canterbury. Thirdly, the pyramidal scheme excludes Ibsenites who were active, important thinkers but who were out of the public eye. Anti-Ibsen critics also overlooked most of the social and professional connections of Ibsenites -- since

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<sup>1</sup>Even after publication of the Quintessence, public recognition of Shaw was minimal. His infamy as an Ibsenite emerged when he became dramatic critic for the Saturday Review in 1895.

they learned who was involved in an Ibsen project only when a public announcement was made, they were largely ignorant of and unconcerned about liaisons and consultations that preceded and enabled the announcements. Finally, the scheme is unreliable simply because Ibsenites never advocated it or substantiated its validity.

The picture of Ibsenite alliances depicted in the anti-Ibsen press is flawed, prejudiced, and one-sided. Ibsenites did not adhere to a 'code' of aesthetic principles or blindly obey the dictates of 'superior' initiates; another, quite different, scheme of Ibsenite alliances existed in 1891.

The Ibsenites were not a formally ranked group, and though the following scheme arranges their names in clusters, this is meant to convey their commitment, activity, and social and professional network rather than their publicly perceived status. All Ibsenites would have agreed that their focus was inward (not upward) to Ibsen, and so this scheme places Ibsen in the centre. Ibsen was in direct contact with three English translators (Archer, Gosse, and Marx Aveling) and they, along with certain other activists formed the 'inner circle' of Ibsenites. Outside this circle was another ring of people supportive of the movement but with less direct responsibility for progress, either because they took a lesser role or because they became active later in the year. Some links exist between the two circles, and other coteries exist as off-shoots from individual relationships. Ibsenites without direct links are indicated in mid-space.



THE IBSENITE NETWORK CA. 1891

The centrality of Ibsen is crucial to the model: all Ibsenism emanated from his work, and though he was not personally involved in England, he was the inspiration and focus of the movement. William Archer's importance may be de-emphasized in this scheme, for many people looked to him for leadership in ways not directly shown in the diagram. He was the one person with whom all the 'inner circle' consulted and cooperated and was regarded as London's direct link to

Ibsen, the one true exponent of Ibsen's wishes. Generally, though, Archer acted as an advisor rather than a policy-maker or an initiator of action, and by daily contact with Shaw, Grein, and Robins was an important consultant on three productions. His criticism was highly respected in literary and theatrical circles but he lacked the political connections of Shaw and Henry James and did little to attract 'the smart set' to Ibsen except through his involvement in the World. His relations with Gosse were not always amicable, but they respected each other's talents and worked together on the acting text of Hedda Gabler. Archer, McCarthy, and Walkley met in the critical stalls several times a week and together represent the triumverate of new critics who regularly wrote theatrical criticism.

Walkley maintained that his own appreciation of Ibsen was incidental, and rejected the label 'Ibsenite.' His criticism was, nevertheless, consistently sympathetic, and as the most widely circulated pro-Ibsen critic his contribution was substantial. He described his allegiance in this way:

If to be an Ibsenite is to swallow Ibsen whole with one's eyes shut as though he was a sacred wafer, to accept all his plays en bloc, to take everything he writes for inspired gospel, why, then I am no Ibsenite....But if to welcome a change in the old dramatic formulas; to be glad of a draught of fresh air into the close atmosphere of the playhouse; to be interested in the tackling of vital, fundamental problems on the stage...to be curious about modes of thought and currents of feeling like our own (as we are all human), yet not like our own (as we are not all Scandinavians) -- if to be these things is to be an Ibsenite, why, I'll take the ticket....there is an absurd notion abroad, especially among those to whom confusion of thought is second nature, that what they call 'Ibsenism' is a sort of creed, a profession of faith; these good people do not suspect that it may be nothing more terrible than an aesthetic appreciation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>'Spectator' [A.B. Walkley], "Vaudeville Theatre," Star, February 24, 1891, p. 2.

C. Lewis Hind later wrote that Walkley possessed "one of the acutest, subtlest, and most amusingly cynical, and least idealistic of modern minds that thought about Ibsen and the world in 1891."<sup>1</sup> Walkley was unusual in qualifying his support of Ibsen, making his appreciation a matter of principle rather than of creed. The Avelings, in contrast, were wholehearted and committed admirers.

The critics in the outer circle were not particularly outspoken in 1891, but they were known to be sympathetic and all contributed important articles at some time during the year. H.L. Braekstad offered emotional support for Ibsenite projects, and is included more for on-going Ibsenism and sympathy with the independent theatre movement than for specific activity in 1891. Lea and Robins produced Hedda Gabler, perhaps the most significant single production for the Ibsenite movement, and Shaw's alliance with Florence Farr brought about the production of Rosmersholm. Most Fabians were sympathetic toward Ibsen, recognizing (like Shaw) the didactic potential of the 'social' plays.<sup>2</sup> In the P.M.G., W.T. Stead maintained an editorial policy that permitted the publishing of letters, articles, and interviews by important Ibsenites, and while avoiding formal links with either side,

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<sup>1</sup>C.L. Hind, More Authors and I (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1922), p. 292.

<sup>2</sup>Ian Britain's remarks call attention to the need for caution in this respect. He writes: "Not all Fabians shared a taste for Ibsen; some, like Annie Besant and William Clarke, had found the themes and tensions in his plays far too discomfiting. It would be unwise, in any case, to suggest that his work was taken up by Fabians simply because they felt an emotional bond with him that acted as a kind of therapeutic support. Some of their number clearly found his work as ill-fitted to their own psychological needs as it was to the particular political purposes of the Fabian Society." Ian Britain, Fabianism and Culture. A Study in British Socialism and the Arts c. 1884-1918 (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1982), p. 172.

he allowed rejoinders from the anti-Ibsenites to accompany contributions from Ibsenites. Charles Charrington and Janet Achurch, though absent, were well remembered as London's first successful producers of Ibsen, and Achurch's performance as Nora remained a yardstick of Ibsenite acting throughout the period. Their Australian progress was duly noted by the English press,<sup>1</sup> and though they did not return in September 1891, but extended their tour into Asia, their fame had not diminished when they returned to the capital in March 1892. Marie Fraser and Rose Norreys also played Nora, and were known to be Ibsenites, but they had no direct links with other members and so are tertiary figures. The infamous eccentric, Oscar Wilde, and his associates were of course sympathetic, but although they corresponded with several members of the inner circle and enthusiastically patronized performances, they were less aligned with Ibsenism than the modernist decadent movement as a whole. William Alison was the voice of Ibsenism in the Playgoers' Review and continued to write occasional articles on Ibsen throughout the decade, later becoming a critic for Life and Dramatic Opinions. William Wilson was the first translator of Brand, but is not known to have direct connections with more active Ibsenites. Herford, too, was a translator of Brand, and wrote articles for the reviews. Walter Scott published the Prose Dramas, Havelock Ellis' The New Spirit, and Shaw's Fabian Essays and The Quintessence of Ibsenism. Shaw negotiated with Fisher Unwin (publisher of The Lady

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<sup>1</sup>See "Theatrical Gossip," Era, August 29, 1891, p. 8; September 19, 1891, p. 10; October 24, 1891, p. 10; and December 12, 1891, p. 10.



from the Sea) over the publication of the Quintessence, but Scott and William Heinemann (publisher of Gosse's translation of Hedda Gabler) became increasingly dominant in Ibsen publishing.

Most of the people represented in this model were involved with specific projects during the first half of the year. In the course of opposing these projects, non-Ibsenites acted to further advertise Ibsenism and encourage interest in it. The rest of this chapter details Ibsenites' schemes for translations, stage productions, and book criticism, followed by a brief account of Ibsenite reaction to stage performances.

### Publishing Projects

Numerous English editions of Ibsen's works appeared in 1891. Wicksteed published translations of a few poems for the Contemporary Review, and in another issue, Herford included "A Scene from Ibsen's Brand," the first English translation of Act IV.<sup>1</sup> Later in the year, William Wilson's full translation of Brand appeared, but although a few reviews noted this event, critics and translators expended much more energy on the social plays.<sup>2</sup> Some time in the spring, the fifth volume of the Prose Dramas introduced Charles Archer's Rosmersholm,

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<sup>1</sup>P.H. Wicksteed, "Henrik Ibsen's Poems," Contemporary Review, September 1891, pp. 333-46; and C.H. Herford, "A Scene from Ibsen's Brand," Contemporary Review, March 1891, pp. 407-22.

<sup>2</sup>Wilson's translation was published by Methuen. For reviews see: Richard A. Armstrong, "Ibsen's Brand," Westminster Review, April 1891, pp. 409-28, rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 255-6; "Brand," Saturday Review, December 19, 1891, p. 705, rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 256-8; J.H. McCarthy, "Pages in Plays. 'Brand,'" Gentleman's Magazine, January 1892, pp. 99-101; and Athenaeum, August 27, 1892, pp. 299-30.

Frances Archer's The Lady from the Sea (~~the play~~ was also re-issued in Marx Aveling's translation by Fisher Unwin), and William Archer's Hedda Gabler (also in a separate shilling edition). The first two of these plays received little critical notice, but the third was a prevailing topic.

Much curiosity was inspired by the announcement, in December 1890, of a new play by Henrik Ibsen, but public interest in England was intensified when the two rival translators *publicly disputed their* rights to publication. The fair copy of Hedda Gabler reached Ibsen's Copenhagen publishers soon after November 18, 1890, and by the end of that month William Heinemann had contracted the rights to publish his first Ibsen play; a generous honorarium of £150 was agreed upon, and Gosse began translating directly from the Danish proofsheets. In the meantime, Archer, who planned to include Hedda Gabler in Scott's Prose Dramas, corresponded with Ibsen and Gosse and agreed to waive first rights in favour of the Heinemann edition.<sup>1</sup> But when the Heinemann-Ibsen contract, signed on January 9, 1891, made it clear that Heinemann claimed exclusive English rights to the play, Archer became alarmed. He might have confined expression his annoyance to an exchange of confidential letters, but when he read Gosse's translation, published on January 20, he became incensed. Considering Gosse's textbook knowledge of Scandinavian languages (acquired in his maturity) and his hastily composed translation, it was hardly surprising that it fell short of Archer's specifications. Not only had Archer, an acknowledged expert on Ibsen's plays and established translator, been

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<sup>1</sup>See Meyer, 1971, Vol. 3, pp. 155-6.

deceived into foregoing English rights to the new play, but his successor had produced a translation "so inconceivably careless and so fantastically inaccurate as to constitute a cruel injustice to Henrik Ibsen." Archer made his displeasure public in an article in the P.M.G., where he detailed some of the blunders in Gosse's text, pointing out that if Gosse and Heinemann had their way, and their version of Hedda Gabler remained the sole representative of the play, England would have to suffer with "one of the very worst translations on record...[for it] reproduces the terse and nervous original about as faithfully as a fourth-form schoolboy, translating at sight, might be expected to reproduce a page of Tacitus."<sup>1</sup>

In a second letter, Archer further indicted Gosse and Heinemann for collaborating to mask their culpability:

Mr. Heinemann assures me that Mr. Gosse failed to inform him of my prior agreement with Henrik Ibsen and of the understanding on which I waived it....[Heinemann says] that the securing of copyright was 'entirely his own idea, and had nothing whatever to do with Mr. Gosse.' That the idea was Mr. Heinemann's I don't doubt; but I possess documentary evidence that it was executed, not only with Mr. Gosse's knowledge, but through Mr. Gosse's agency.<sup>2</sup>

Heinemann responded by accusing Archer of wanting to pirate the play by exploiting the Convention of Berne, which did not include Danish publications. Heinemann defended himself by stating that he had purchased full legal rights to the play and copyrighted it with Ibsen's consent, thereby rendering Archer's objections groundless.

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "A Translator-Traitor. Mr. Edmund Gosse and Henrik Ibsen," P.M.G., January 23, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>William Archer, "Mr. Gosse and Ibsen," Letter to the P.M.G., January 27, 1891, p. 2.

Mr. Archer, being prevented by the law from doing what he did not scruple to do when prohibited merely by the moral code, has the naivete to expose his wrath in the public prints. I submit that his position is amusing. Certainly it is not one on which he can base a quarrel.<sup>1</sup>

Archer was forced to play his hand. He produced documentary evidence showing that, in June 1890, he negotiated the rights to publish Hedda Gabler simultaneously with the Copenhagen edition, and that, in August 1890, he withdrew his privilege so that Ibsen could receive the larger fee that Gosse's publisher was prepared to pay, on the express understanding that Heinemann was simply paying for the right to the first issue of the play. Archer attempted to maintain his dignity throughout the dispute, in spite of accusations of vindictive behaviour. He concluded the matter by writing:

It has been hinted in several quarters that my recent exposure of Mr. Gosse's mistranslation of 'Hedda Gabler' was inspired by resentment of that gentleman's spirited policy in breaking through some sort of monopoly which I am supposed to claim in the translations and interpretations of Ibsen....The whole trouble has arisen from my ill-advised and ill requited courtesy in yielding to Mr. Gosse, not a monopoly, which I never dreamed of asserting, but an important privilege which was fully assured to me.<sup>2</sup>

Having established his right to translate the play, Archer prepared a rival version under Scott's imprint. Before long, the translators achieved a reconciliation and composed what was understood to be a joint translation to be used by Robins' company.

The new play was impatiently awaited. In September 1890, Miss Werner of the Review of Reviews interviewed Ibsen and tried to obtain his permission to include an abstract of Hedda Gabler in the Christmas

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<sup>1</sup>William Heinemann, "Mr. Archer, Mr. Gosse, Mr. Heinemann, and Ibsen," Letter to the P.M.G., February 4, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>William Archer, Letter to the P.M.G., February 4, 1891, p. 2.

issue. Ibsen was entirely secretive about his forthcoming work, and refused her request, though when Gosse's translation became the "Book of the Month" in February 1891, Ibsen's signed photograph to Miss Werner accompanied the article.<sup>1</sup> Shortly before the play was published, Gosse's article, "Ibsen's New Drama," tantalized readers of the Fortnightly Review with hints about the play's situation, brief descriptions of the characters, and samples of dialogue: it was excellent publicity.

Because Gosse's translation was the first to be printed, it was the version that was reviewed by the critics in January, February, and March. Although they saw merit in the play, not even the Ibsenites were complimentary about Gosse's part in the work. Unable to compare it with the original, C.H. Herford judged the translation "to be adequate, though rather less felicitously colloquial than Mr. Archer's similar work."<sup>2</sup> Walkley was less kind, and though he admitted that Archer's prose was sometimes overly literal and rigid, "it is pure, it is nervous, it is masculine; it is never slipshod, never vulgar," whereas Gosse's Hedda Gabler was quite unacceptable: "It is not English; it is not even stagey. The feeblest of Ibsen's translators have not been able to hide from us Ibsen's great qualities of conciseness, simplicity, and strength -- qualities converted by Mr. Gosse into wishy-washy twaddle."<sup>3</sup> Walkley remarked on the technical merits of the play as a theatre piece -- attributes so strong that not even Gosse's translation

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<sup>1</sup>[W.T. Stead?], "Some New Books of the Month," Review of Reviews, February 1891, pp. 187-8.

<sup>2</sup>C.H. Herford, "Hedda Gabler: a Drama," Academy, February 14, 1891, p. 155.

<sup>3</sup>[A.B. Walkley], "Ibsen's New Play," Speaker, February 14, 1891, p. 200.

could fully obscure them. Herford disagreed, and while attempting to point out all its meritorious features, concluded that "it is the work of a great artist, but he has not succeeded in giving his study in a provincial hospital the universality of great art."<sup>1</sup>

Much of the non-Ibsenite reaction was censorious (see Chapter Five) and at least one critic doubted "if anyone is to be found with the courage to re-write it for the stage, if any manager ever has the greater courage to produce it in London, and if there is any actress living, or yet to be born, who will dare to essay the character of Hedda."<sup>2</sup> Yet, as the Ibsenites were eager to advertise, all Europe had taken up Hedda Gabler, and in London producers and actresses competed to be the first to stage it. When "popular evening papers announce[d] it in their bills, with all the importance they would allot to a fashionable divorce case or an unfashionable murder," what true Victorian could resist it?<sup>3</sup>

#### Stage Productions -- "Rosmersholm"

Late in 1890, would-be Ibsen producers began to prepare their productions. Because the Ibsenites were a disparate group, only loosely linked by their mutual admiration for Ibsen, they were sometimes completely unaware of each others' plans, and there was confusion over who intended to produce which play. Shaw's meddling eliminated duplication. In the autumn of 1890, Marion Lea contemplated a

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<sup>1</sup>Academy, op cit.

<sup>2</sup>Evening News and Post, January 19, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>J.H. McCarthy, "Hedda Gabler," Life, January 24, 1891, p. 1173.

production of The Lady from the Sea, but so did Florence Farr. When Farr approached Shaw, requesting that he oblige her by playing the part of the Stranger ("She said that as I had a red beard she thought I would look the part in a pea jacket," wrote Shaw, but "I pleaded ineptitude and declined"),<sup>1</sup> he advised her to tackle Rosmersholm instead. On October 11, Shaw "delivered to her so powerful a discourse on Rosmersholm that she was resolved to create Rebecca or die." By October 13, Farr had begun to study Charles Archer's proofs (corrected by William), and planned to present the play some time early the following year, with the financial support of John Todhunter.<sup>2</sup> Before long, Lea abandoned The Lady from the Sea, and Shaw put Alma Murray (who had performed in The Cenci, A Blot on the 'Scutcheon, and other experimental productions) onto that play, instead of Rosmersholm, which she had originally hoped to do. Shaw warned Murray that if she did not announce her intentions quickly she might lose that project too, but she did not take his advice, and neither she nor anyone else claimed The Lady from the Sea for several months.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>From a letter by Shaw to Achurch, January 6, 1891, in Wisenthal, 1979, p. 20. s.a. Shaw's Diaries, October 11, 1890.

<sup>2</sup>See Laurence, 1965, p. 288. Julie Hollege states that the production was financed by a legacy left to Farr by her father, but this claim is not substantiated. (Innocent Flowers. Women in the Edwardian Theatre, London: Virago, 1981, pp. 17-8.) Shaw records that Todhunter agreed to finance Farr as long as Alma Murray's rights to present Rosmersholm in Louis N. Parker's translation were not infringed upon. (Laurence, 1965, p. 272.)

<sup>3</sup>Lea's decision to abandon The Lady from the Sea probably stemmed from her engagement in The Sixth Commandment, which opened at the Shaftesbury on October 8, 1890. She was then steadily employed until she completed the run of Hedda Gabler, at the end of May 1891. Lea probably communicated her forfeit to Archer on October 13, 1890, when she visited his home. See Shaw's Diaries, October 13, 1890, and Shaw's letter to Alma Murray, October 13, 1890, in Laurence, 1965, p.272.

Meanwhile, Shaw's flirtation with Florence Farr blossomed while he coached her in minute detail over pronunciation and character interpretation.<sup>1</sup> On January 9, six days before Farr had planned to present Rosmersholm, Ibsen was "In Difficulties," and Shaw, prompted by a desire for publicity and by frustration with his attempts to cast the play, appealed in a letter to the editor of the P.M.G. for a volunteer from Stead's staff to fill the uncast roles. Shaw's attempts to sign qualified actors were thwarted by the managers, who would not release their players from contracts.

The managers will neither play Ibsen themselves nor allow any one else to play him. In 1889 Mr. Charrington and Miss Janet Achurch had to go into management themselves at a heavy risk to put on 'The Doll's House'. As managers they were able to offer Mr. Waring, for example, a regular engagement as well as the enviable chance of 'creating' the part of Helmer. At present we naturally turn to Mr. Waring to 'create' the part of Rosmer at an experimental matinee; but the management of the Shaftesbury Theatre vetoes the proposition.<sup>2</sup>

Shaw encountered the same problem with Johnston Forbes-Robertson (of the Garrick) and T.B. Thalberg (of the Adelphi),<sup>and</sup> when producing A Doll's House Marie Fraser experienced similar difficulties with other managers. All the established managers, it seemed to Shaw, were determined to keep their performers from acting in Ibsen plays without explaining why, and certainly without intending to take the roles themselves.

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<sup>1</sup>"By early October...Shaw had found a new Ibsen heroine, a thirty-year-old aspirant actress named Florence Farr. He met her through May Morris, who was teaching her embroidery...and at a soiree of the Hammersmith Socialist Society....Her intellectual style resembled that of Shaw....Shaw was at once attracted, and he met her often that autumn....if she would let him be her mentor, he believed, he could breathe greatness into her. (MacKenzie, 1977, p. 172.)

<sup>2</sup>G.B. Shaw, "Ibsen in Difficulties," Letter to P.M.G., January 9, 1891, p. 2.



Shaw's appeal prompted a series of replies, including one from Robert Buchanan, whose services the desperate Shaw had actually considered requesting. He assumed that Buchanan's conscience would not allow him to participate in an Ibsenite production,<sup>1</sup> though it seems he underestimated the man's sporting instinct:

...no such conscience...would prevent me from accepting the part of Rosmer, if it were offered to me. I think, indeed, that the best way to settle the claims of the 'greatest living dramatist' would be to get his works acted as often as possible, for there is a curious anomaly in the position of a dramatist whom no manager wants to have anything to do with. I go further than this, however, and concede to every articulate author the right to be heard, and to be judged by public opinion. I am as anxious, therefore, as any Ibsenite to see 'Rosmersholm' properly staged and interpreted....If Mr. Bernard Shaw himself will undertake the character, supported (say) by Mr. Archer and other followers of the Prophet of Photography, I will gladly contribute to the expenses of the matinee and pay for my seat into the bargain....A Socialist Clown, with his tongue in his cheek, flourishing the red hot poker of pantomimic Individualism, and attended by a saturnine critic as Pantaloon, would be really seasonable. Then...for the first time, the great amateur dramatist, whose dramas are too good for ordinary representation, would be rightly interpreted.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Buchanan called himself an Ibsenite, but he was far from being any such thing (see Chapter Five). He regarded Ibsen's philosophy as pessimistic, whereas he called himself an optimist. Although they identified some of the same problems in society they saw very different solutions to them. Buchanan had difficulty seeing any of the characteristics of Ibsen's art so apparent to Shaw and others, as this passage shows: "Ibsen's people seem to me to be moral Phantoms, -- hypochondriacs of the Ideal, searching their own sanctums (as the old priests searched the entrails) for signs & portents. The result, to my mind, is universal ugliness, the very negation of the law of Art, which is beauty. The very writing is devoid of both grace & charm. The joy of life has gone out of these creatures, as surely as it has gone out of the dwellers among avid orthodox creeds." (Letter from Buchanan to Shaw, BL Add. MS 50529, fol. 181.)

<sup>2</sup>Robert Buchanan, Letter to the P.M.G., January 12, 1891, p. 2.

A leading article in the next day's P.M.G. suggested that the unclaimed roles should be filled by 'resting' actors -- they might not be ideally cast, but they would at least enable the play to be seen.<sup>1</sup> The Stage insinuated that Shaw's appeal was motivated by a desire for personal publicity, and perhaps it was, as Charles Hudson was loaned by the Haymarket, where he was appearing as Captain Leddra in The Dancing Girl.<sup>2</sup> In the P.M.G. of January 12, A.L. Baldry (acting manager of Farr's company) called Shaw's original letter into question by making it clear that Shaw spoke on his own account, and not for the management of the production. He disputed Shaw's statement that the play had been planned for January 15, stating that the date originally selected was early February, by which time Baldry was confident that an appropriate company could be assembled.<sup>3</sup>

William Archer eventually secured the services of Frank Benson, then between his winter and spring tours, as Rosmer. Benson was far from an ideal Rosmer, and his performance typified the plague of 'old school' acting that marred early Ibsen productions. Rehearsals were not without conflict, as Benson recalled in his memoirs:

Very early differences of opinion became manifest between Archer and myself as to the right way of treating the story. I thought myself a little fettered by what I called 'amateur stage-management.' Archer complained -- with some show of justice -- of my carelessness in studying the text....I feel that he had just reason to be dissatisfied with my Rosmer,

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<sup>1</sup>'R.U.E.', "Stage and Song," P.M.G., January 13, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>"Chit Chat," Stage, January 15, 1891, p. 12. Shaw did not mention that Tree had refused to cooperate, but implied that it would be useless to ask Irving, and mentions only the other (lesser) managers that he approached.

<sup>3</sup>A.L. Baldry, "Ibsen in Difficulties," Letter to P.M.G., January 12, 1891, p. 2.

and, in spite of my avowed dislike of his theories and point of view, he always treated me with courtesy and consideration.<sup>1</sup>

Benson's complaint about "amateur stage-management" introduces the difficult question of identifying who was responsible for the staging of this production. Officially, A.L. Baldry was the acting manager, John Todhunter the stage manager, Archer the translator, and Shaw the leading actress' boyfriend. The strict division of these roles blurred when Shaw gave private coaching to Farr throughout the rehearsal period, when Archer and Shaw meddled in matters of casting, and when Shaw wrote to the press about a problem of which the official director was unaware. As the author's representative at rehearsals, Archer's criticism of Benson's reading is justifiable, but protocol should have restrained him from engaging in direct argument with the actor or from trying to impose his own reading of the play. Such blunders and tactlessness delayed the matinee until February 23. A repeat performance was given on March 5. In mid-March, Farr attempted to revive the production, with Herman Vezin as Rosmer, but she did not succeed with either project.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Benson, My Memoirs (London: Ernest Benn, 1930), p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>See "Dramatic and Musical Topics," Topical Times, March 14, 1891, p. 5. The latter performance is announced in "Drama," I.S.D.N., May 30, 1891, p. 425. s.a. Shaw's letter to Farr, May 1, 1891, in Laurence, 1965, pp. 295-7. Shaw cryptically alluded in jargon intermixed with references to his recent shown-down with Jenny Patterson to what may have been a planned revival. He noted in his diary on August 24, 1891: "After dinner went down to F.E. [Florence (Farr) Emery] & went over the 2nd Act of Rosmersholm," so perhaps they still contemplated a revival as late as August or September (see Shaw, "Ibsen in Difficulties," P.M.G., January 9, 1891, p. 2).

-- Fraser's Doll's House

While Shaw and Farr made plans for the premiere of Rosmersholm, a young actress named Marie Fraser mounted a production of A Doll's House in her native Edinburgh.<sup>1</sup> The assembled officers and guests of the Grand Lodge of Freemasons who had not officially attended a dramatic performance for forty years, gave the play a warm reception. Unlike the heroines of most modern drama, Fraser's Nora was not a "mechanical figure pulled by dramatic wires; she was a woman whose heart was palpitating with the joy of life -- a woman to whom tragedy when it came took the form of the rebellion of a loving nature against her husband's crude, cramping, and conventional ideal of domesticity."<sup>2</sup> On the strength of such notices, Fraser and her leading man, C. Forbes-Drummond prepared to take London by storm. On January 27, they gave a matinee performance at Terry's, with a fully professional cast that included Elizabeth Robins as Mrs. Linden. Fraser's enthusiasm for Ibsen did not wane after this performance, although it was clear that a London run would not be possible. On March 7, it was said that Fraser was contemplating a production of The Wild Duck, in which she would

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<sup>1</sup>c.f. Chapter Two. Numerous sources claim that Fraser toured the production in the English provinces and in Scotland but no substantiation for this has been found. The Edinburgh reviewers did not mention a tour.  
<sup>2</sup>"'A Doll's House' at the Theatre Royal," Edinburgh Evening News, November 25, 1890, p. 2. s.a. [Edinburgh] Evening Dispatch, November 25, 1890, p. 2, where the play is not so well liked but Fraser is commended.

play Hedwig;<sup>1</sup> Shaw mentioned that she talked wildly of producing The Wild Duck and The Lady from the Sea in London and the provinces, in collaboration with Marion Lea, but nothing came of it.<sup>2</sup>

## -- Ghosts

McCarthy formulated two projects but both were thwarted. He was interested in adapting Hedda Gabler (probably modifying Gosse's dialogue), and one source reports that he organized a performance -- or possibly a reading -- of the play at the Lyric Club, on March 6. When Heinemann withdrew McCarthy's acting rights in favour of Robins,<sup>3</sup> the Lyric scheme and McCarthy's other plan for a performance of Hedda Gabler at a censorship-free theatre like the Parisian Théâtre Libre collapsed. Grein had a prior claim on the free theatre idea, and when he announced Ghosts, McCarthy quietly retired.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Theatrical Gossip," Era, March 7, 1891, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Shaw's letter to Charrington, March 30, 1891, in Laurence, 1965, p. 290.

<sup>3</sup>G.G. Cima, "Elizabeth Robins: The Genesis of an Independent Manageress," Theatre Survey, Vol. 21, 1980, p. 151.

<sup>4</sup>The two known references to these projects are confusing. The Daily News reported that McCarthy "has made arrangements with Ibsen's London publisher for producing an English version of this play Hedda Gabler, on which he (Mr. McCarthy) is just now engaged in association with Mr. Charles Colnaghi." Their theatre was to be free of censorship, but Grein "puts in a claim to priority, he having projected a Theatre Libre or 'I.T.' and published details of his scheme six months ago." ("The Theatres," February 9, 1891, p. 3.) The other reference is from the Sunday Times: "the Lyric Club, with its usual alacrity to be 'up to date,' promises a performance of 'Hedda Gabler,' adapted by Mr. Justin Huntley McCarthy, who avows himself a rabid Ibsenite. Presumably Mr. McCarthy will take council with Mr. Archer, so that the treacheries of translation of which the latter accuses Mr. Gosse may not be perpetrated in the acting." ("At the Play," February 15, 1891, p. 7.)

Various schemes for an uncommercial theatre had been proposed by George Moore, Justin McCarthy, Oswald Crawford, B.W. Findon, and William Archer, with repertoire companies, subscription seasons, company-management, unification of amateur clubs, and entrepreneurial funding figuring in the plans. Antoine's example seemed to encourage Britons to create a comparable (though not necessarily similar) organization for the production of plays that would not otherwise be seen in London. Grein's dreams for a purely artistic theatre date from November 1889. In July 1890, he tried to secure the Novelty Theatre for a season beginning in September or October.<sup>1</sup> For unknown reasons, he did not take the Novelty and delayed implementing his ideas until early the following year. In 1891, he allied with George Moore, Henry James, Thomas Hardy, George Meredith, William Archer, and others to propose a subscription season of five performances (at £2 10s per membership) that would include great European plays and English drama inspired by the foreign examples.<sup>2</sup> With fifty pounds earned by

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<sup>1</sup>See "Chit Chat," Stage, July 18, 1890, p. 9; and J.T. Grein, letter to St. James's Gazette, July 21, 1890, pp. 5-6. The Novelty had been dark from April 8 until September 30, 1890. It was then steadily engaged until the end of the year. If Grein had been serious about his plans to open in September, he had a whole month when the theatre was unclaimed; alternately, he could have used it in the afternoons.

<sup>2</sup>See William Archer, "An Uncommercial Theatre," I.L.N., February 7, 1891, p. 187; and J.T. Grein, "The Independent Theatre," Black and White, March 14, 1891, p. 167. Performances were originally planned for March 13, April 24, May 29, June 26, and September 11, but finances prohibited the program being carried out. (Editorial, "The Independent Theatre," Stage, March 12, 1891, p. 8.)

promoting Pinero's and Jones' plays in Holland and thirty pounds in translator's fees, Grein formed the Independent Theatre Society of London (I.T.S.).<sup>1</sup>

The I.T.S. was the best-organized production team to attempt an Ibsen play up to March 1891. By the middle of February, the venue (the Athenaeum on Tottenham Court Road), the date (March 6), and the cast had been chosen for the English premiere of Ghosts. The venue was soon changed to the Royalty, and the date was altered to March 13.

Frank Lindo (the Treasurer of the I.T.S.) was cast as Oswald, with Leonard Outram as Pastor Manders, Sydney Howard as Engstrand, and a young ingenue named Edith Kenward as Regina. Alice (Mrs. Theodore) Wright, a Fabian,<sup>2</sup> wandered into Grein's rooms to enquire about his forthcoming production. "He was immediately struck by the timbre of her voice, detecting in it his conception of the maternal accent to perfection." On the strength of her reading of Act III, Grein immediately cast her, saying: "I know nothing about you, but you will play 'Mrs. Alving' and you will be famous next morning." Eleanor Marx

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<sup>1</sup>Of this £80 capital, none was lost. Receipts matched or exceeded expenses, leaving the principal intact for subsequent productions. (Michael Orme, J.T. Grein: The Story of a Pioneer, London: John Murray, 1936, p. 91.) Samuel Waxman quoted Grein as saying that in October 1891, the I.T.S. had only £88: "It was with the help of Frank Harris, Frank Danby, and a few others that I obtained enough money to give a second performance." (Antoine and the Théâtre Libre (New York: Harvard U.P., 1926, rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1964), p. 214)

<sup>2</sup>"Mrs. Theodore Wright was the former wife of George Holyoake, the Owenite, Co-operator and Secularist who was the last Englishman to be gaoled on a charge of atheism. He was the editor of The Reasoner and, though his wife left him for another, she had mixed in socialist circles since the days of the International and she both married and became a Fabian." (Kapp, 1972, p. 193.) She began her stage career under her maiden name, Alice Austin.

Aveling had aspired to the role of Mrs. Alving, but when this 'unknown' was cast instead, she gave a supper party where Grein was confronted about his decision.

When the tankard had made room for the coffee-cups, the whole party made a dead set on J.T. What! Was he going to give the greatest part in modern tragedy to an amateur? Did he know that he was imperilling the whole enterprise, exposing himself to ridicule, etc. etc.? J.T. was unabashed. He listened and, when it was his turn to speak, replied simply 'That may be, but I have been brought up to the maxim that a man's word is his bond. Mrs. Theodore Wright will play 'Mrs. Alving.' The members of the party were doleful and their eyes expressed commiseration for 'poor little Grein.'<sup>1</sup>

Thereafter, the Avelings disassociated themselves from the I.T.S.

Alice Wright was not without experience on the stage -- she had acted for the New Shakespeare Society, she played at Saddler's Wells, and was popular at the Hall of Science as a reader and reciter.<sup>2</sup> Ibsenites and non-Ibsenites alike regarded the I.T.S.'s introduction of her to the public as a great service to stage art. Her career did not profit as much as it might have after Ghosts, as she remained faithful to avant-garde drama, appearing in Therese Raquin later in 1891, the Charringtons' 1892 season, An Enemy of the People in 1894, both revivals of Ghosts, and a few other experimental matinees and short runs.

When the I.T.S.'s plans to produce Ghosts were announced at the February 10th Playgoers' Club meeting,<sup>3</sup> resistance to the idea of a free theatre, to a foreign repertoire, to the specific characteristics

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<sup>1</sup>Orme, 1936, pp. 83-4.

<sup>2</sup>See Kapp, 1972, pp. 172, 193; and "Who's Who," Evening News and Post, March 14, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Curiously, a few days before this, Tree was said "to have 'Ghosts' on his list of prospective plays." ("Between the Acts," Queen, January 31, 1891, p. 184.)



of Ghosts, and to the I.T.S.'s audacity in presenting an unlicensed play in a licensed theatre were immediately expressed. Grein patiently explained that his theatre would broaden playgoers' experience and expose writers of the artificial drama to modern continental masterpieces. Star actors and expensive scenery, costumes, and props are not necessary to convey the dramatic power of a great play, especially Ghosts, "a work of art overpowering in its extreme simplicity, and therefore useful as a lesson in the craft of playwriting." But London was largely unprepared for such a lesson, and tried to call in the law to prevent the performance.<sup>1</sup>

A leader in the Stage conscientiously outlined the legal ramifications of the I.T.S.'s actions, arguing that the subscription system did not exempt the organization from prosecution under Section XVI. of the 1843 Act for Regulating Theatres.<sup>2</sup> Up to the day of performance, the public wondered whether Ghosts could be acted without incurring fifty pound fines on each cast member, or causing the closure of the Royalty Theatre. The Lord Chamberlain's department was confused about its jurisdiction, though according to Grein, E.F. Smyth Pigott (the Examiner of Plays), was certain about his position with regard to Ghosts' license:

The reader of plays in the 'nineties, Mr. Pigott, was a good friend of mine. He was a lover of French drama, and great in latitude as a censor. One day I told him of my intention to do for London what Antoine had done for Paris...and in order to counteract the reactionary spirit which then prevailed in

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<sup>1</sup>J.T. Grein, "To Friend and Foe," Playgoers' Review, March 16, 1891, pp. 73-5. For examples of objections to the I.T.S. see Austin Fryers, "Schemes for the Unacted," Playgoers' Review, March 16, 1891, pp. 82-4; and Evening Standard, February 11, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Leading article, "The Independent Theatre," Stage, March 12, 1891, pp. 8-9.

our playhouses. I told him that to hit home I must hit hard, and take the most modern, the most profound, the most shocking tragedy to open the campaign....He was horror-struck. 'Ghosts!' he exclaimed. 'Never come to me with 'Ghosts'; it is a waste of time to ask for the license.' 'But,' said I, 'Mr. Pigott, where is the logic, when you license every French farce in French, and would stifle the voice of a master?' He replied: 'My dear young man, when French plays come to London with French players, I consider that the theatre in which they act is for the time being French territory.' I answered nothing, but....took my hat and determined to play 'Ghosts' for art's sake -- not for gain --in defiance of the law.<sup>1</sup>

Ghosts was presented on Friday, March 13. No immediate action was taken to punish the I.T.S., which gave rise to speculation about whether the matter would be mentioned in Parliament. Moy Thomas informed Grein that the Home Office had requested its representative to keep quiet:

...as nothing was known in Government circles concerning Ghosts, and the question might put the house in an embarrassing position. There was good cause for this apprehension, for, if report speaks true, one Member had already asked, 'Who is this man Ibsen?' As a matter of fact, Downing Street was afraid to make England the laughing-stock

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<sup>1</sup>From cutting files in the Houghton Library Theatre Collection; untitled clipping dated May 15, 1914 (quoted in Paulus, 1959, pp. 151-2). The Lord Chamberlain's failure to issue a statement of policy frustrated anti-Ibsen partisans. Clement Scott wrote to Sir Ponsonby-Fane (Pigott's supervisor) a few days before the performance, requesting an interview about the matter (LC Correspondence 1. Vol. 564, no. 25.) Ponsonby-Fane's memo states the following reasons for non-intervention: "The Independent Theatre is not a Theatre at all -- It is a Club founded by a Mr. Green [sic] on the model of the 'Theatre Libre' at Paris, to produce for private performance Pieces which have not passed the Censorship. In the case reported to-day in the Newspapers Mr. Green hired an unoccupied Theatre 'the Royalty' for a private performance for 'Members of the Club and their Friends only' of Ibsen's unlicensed Play of the 'Ghosts,' which though harmless in language would Certainly not be licensed by the Lord Chamberlain. Mr. Ibsen is a Danish writer who has attained a Reputation of late as a Realistic Writer of the Manner of Zola: His works however being Dramatic instead of Novelistic. The Performance being Absolutely a Private one the Lord Chamberlain has no power to interfere." (LC Correspondence 1, Vol. 565, no. 8, March 14, 1891.)

of Europe, since Ghosts had long been recognized the Continent over, where it was produced without let or hindrance as one of the great plays of the age.<sup>1</sup>

No official action was ever taken. Kate Santley, the lessee of the Royalty, was sufficiently frightened, as were other London managers, that she would not allow the I.T.S. to present another unlicensed play on her premises. When the I.T.S. revived Ghosts in 1893 and 1897 (and also when it wished to avoid paying licensing fees), performances were given in halls not under the authority of the Lord Chamberlain.

The Wild Duck and Act IV of Brand were both proposed for subsequent I.T.S. bills in 1891.<sup>2</sup> Although the I.T.S. still hoped to produce The Wild Duck in the spring of 1892,<sup>3</sup> it was not staged in England until 1894. Herford's translation made Brand viable, but neither the I.T.S. nor Robins produced it that season. In 1893, Robins sponsored a reading of Act IV, and the first full-length production was by the Play Actors in 1912.

-- Hedda Gabler

Henrik Ibsen was colloquially dubbed a 'woman's playwright,' and Hedda Gabler, as everyone soon discovered, was an archetypal femme fatale. In spite of this, when Lily Langtry became the first English

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Orme, 1936, pp. 86-7.

<sup>2</sup>"The Actor," People, March 8, 1891, p. 4; "Plays and Players," Globe, March 26, 1891, p. 6; and "Chit Chat," Stage, October 15, 1891, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>George Moore, "The Independent Theatre," Letter to the Times, October 13, 1891, p. 5.

actress to claim the role, many people were more than surprised. Langtry, too, was surprised when she actually read the play, whereupon she immediately gave up her claim.<sup>1</sup>

Several would-be producers approached Heinemann (owner of the theatrical rights) and challenged his preference for McCarthy. Although Archer at first favoured "Langtry or Tree or some accredited or long established management," Robins and Lea eventually won his support, and after a month or so they also secured Heinemann's.<sup>2</sup> Unlike McCarthy, Robins and Lea wanted to present the text unadapted and, preferring Archer's translation to Gosse's, commissioned a speakable text.<sup>3</sup> They wanted to perform Hedda Gabler at a series of matinees, and set out to find a manager who would sponsor the play and lend a theatre.

The London managers -- all male -- objected to Hedda on the grounds that it was a bad play, that it was a 'woman's play,' and because there was no part in it for any self-respecting leading man. They closed ranks and made themselves unapproachable. Without the sponsorship, or at least the cooperation, of an established actor-

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<sup>1</sup>See "Dramatic and Musical Topics," Topical Times, January 31, 1891, pp. 5-7, and February 7, p. 5; and "The Theatres," Daily News, February 9, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>From a transcript of Robins' diary, January 1891, in the Fales Library. (quoted in Cima, 1980, p. 151).

<sup>3</sup>Robins stated that though Gosse and Archer were collaborators, the final version of the spoken text was practically identical to the version in Scott's Prose Dramas (Robins, 1932, p. 25). The typescript deposited with the Lord Chamberlain is, for the most part, a composite of Archer's dialogue and Gosse's stage directions (BL, LC Plays 53471, license 76). Robins and Lea suggested other modifications to Archer in order to obtain a fully speakable text. A meticulously revised text is in the possession of the Fales Library. Gosse's text was sold at the theatre, but not because it was thought to be the superior version; Robins was adamant that the acting text should not be accessible either in Britain or America (Robins to William Archer, BL Add. MS 45295, fol. 32-3).

manager it was almost inconceivable that a series of matinees could take place.<sup>1</sup> Most actresses would have regarded this an insuperable patriarchal obstacle, but Robins and Lea were deeply committed to Ibsen, genuinely bored with the trite ingenue roles that they were customarily offered in the West End, and idealistic about the theatre.<sup>2</sup> Robins was absolutely determined to hang on to a magnificent acting opportunity when it became available:

You may be able to imagine the excitement of coming across anything so alive as Hedda. What you won't be able to imagine (unless you are an actress in your twenties) is the joy of having in our hands -- free hands -- such gloriousactable stuff. If we had been thinking politically, concerning ourselves about the emancipation of women, we would not have given the Ibsen plays the particular kind of whole-hearted, enchanted devotion we did give. We were actresses -- actresses who wouldn't for a kingdom be anything else. We got over that; but I am talking about '89-'91. How were we to find fault with a state of society that had given us Nora and Hedda and Thea?<sup>3</sup>

It was Lea who first suggested that they should produce Hedda themselves -- an unusual venture for actresses at the time -- and Robins agreed. They pooled their resources, and on the security of

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Terry and Thomas Thorne had rented their theatres for single matinees of Ibsen plays without expecting to participate in the acting; Terry's and the Vaudeville were popular venues for matinees in 1891. These managers performed in only a third of the productions staged at their theatres in 1891.

<sup>2</sup>A production of Hedda Gabler fitted neatly into Robins' dream of "An association of workers, Art for Art's sake...Our aim...doing work of the highest kind without money and without price....We could explore the wide field of classical poetic Drama. We could work the Marlowe vein, then Ibsen and any other helpful modern. We would get the practice we lack in these times of long runs....Lifting higher the standard of dramatic work, we should help actors, the stage -- the world." (From Robins' typed MS Whither and How, Chapter One, p. 11, entry for October 3, 1890, Fales Library.) Robins was so sincere that when, in 1890, Lewis Waller asked her to perform the original text of Antigone, Robins set out to learn the language. (Whither and How, Chapter Three.)

<sup>3</sup>Robins, 1928, pp. 31-2.

Lea's jewelled bracelet, Robins' "small treasure," and a loan of £300, they hired the Vaudeville Theatre from Thomas Thorne, and (along with Archer) cast the play as though they were "choosing a Cabinet at a national crisis."<sup>1</sup>

Scott Buist was engaged as Tesman, Charles Sugden as Judge Brack,<sup>2</sup> Arthur Elwood as Lovborg, Henrietta Cowen as Aunt Julie, and Patty Chapman as Bertha. Robins played the title role and Lea portrayed Thea Elvsted. They rehearsed long, carefully, and enthusiastically. The success of the April 20-24 matinees and the subsequent evening run throughout the month of May convinced Archer that a provincial tour would be profitable,<sup>3</sup> but the managers did not undertake one. They did, however, perform a scene at a private party in June.

"We came out of it all," recalled Robins, "without the loss of the bracelet or the small treasure, with a tidy balance at the bank, with a kindling memory and a lesson."<sup>4</sup> Their utopian ideas flourished.

We dreamed of an escape, through hard work, and through deliberate abandonment of the idea of making money -- beyond what would give us the wages of going on. We would organize a season -- leading up to future seasons -- of that Lea-Robins Joint Management...that had already seen 'Hedda' through....As time went on, more and more of the public would be fired by the still unexplored possibilities of the theatre....We wouldn't be able to afford advertising. What of that? Other people, 'our public,' who cared about this new kind of theatre, must advertise it. With the same passion of care we had given to the much-praised 'Hedda' cast, we would choose and keep together a permanent nucleus -- making now and then special engagements as fresh plays

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>"Charles Sugden...was better known as a co-respondent in a famous divorce action brought by the Earl of Desart than as an actor, having, until 1887, appeared under the stage name of Charles Neville." (Laurence, 1965, p. 291.)

<sup>3</sup>Letter from William Archer to Elizabeth Robins, May 27, 1891. (Robins Collection, Fales Library.)

<sup>4</sup>Robins, 1928, p. 32.

might require....We would attract the more intelligent player by a variety of dramatic opportunities that no theatre dependent on the long run could offer....Others would be glad to take salaries as modest as our own for joy of the new work and the glory of the new aim.<sup>1</sup>

In 1893, they presented a short season of Ibsen plays, but a permanent company was never established. Robins' increasing commitment to feminist issues took her to the speaker's platform, and inspired her to write novels and plays portraying the suffragette cause. She was unable to fulfill her idealistic vision in the world in which she lived: the restrictions imposed by a theatrical system where the masters were men and where art was of little consequence drove her out of the profession.<sup>2</sup> In 1892, Lea married, retired from the theatre, and eventually moved back to America.

#### -- Other Projects

The reformist idealism of Grein, Robins, and Lea did not extend to other would-be managers. In February, Wilson Barrett announced that he would revive The Pillars of Society, with himself as Bernick, Winifred Emery as Dina Dorf, and Elizabeth Robins as Martha (Robins never

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<sup>1</sup>Robins, 1932, pp. 30-31.

<sup>2</sup>See Ibid, pp. 29-30. s.a. Jane Marcus' introduction to Robins' most famous novel, The Convert. Marcus makes some exaggerated claims about Robins' influence and accomplishments in the avant garde of the 90s, but the biographical details she gives are important: Robins was responsible for the support of her mother (who was still in America) and financed her younger brother's medical training by playing ingenues in London. It may have been the completion of her brother's training that freed Robins to attend to her own ambitions, to give up regular acting work, to help organize the Actresses' Franchise League, and to contribute to the well-being of female artists by maintaining a retreat for them in her home in the south of England. The Convert (1907, rpt. London: The Women's Press, 1980).

referred to this and it is very possible that she had nothing to do with the production).<sup>1</sup> Barrett was moved, he told the Daily News, by "'the popular clamour for more Ibsen'" and (it may be speculated) pecuniary gain and personal publicity.<sup>2</sup> The production seemed to be perpetually "forthcoming" all of February, March, and April. Barrett leased the Olympic Theatre from December 1890 to May 1891, producing numerous short-lived pieces and single matinees, but an Ibsen piece was never performed there.

The Lady from the Sea had been considered by several actresses, but on May 11-15, a little-known performer named Rose Mellor presented it at a series of matinees at Terry's Theatre. A few Ibsenites had hoped to see Ellen Terry as Ellida, and were sorely disappointed when a performer of vastly inferior skills attempted the part.<sup>3</sup> Mellor does not appear to have had any alliance with others in the Ibsenite movement (except a utilitarian partnership with the translator, Eleanor Marx Aveling, and Edward Aveling), and is not known to have made

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<sup>1</sup>"Theatrical Gossip," Era, April 4, 1891, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>"The Theatre," Daily News, February 9, 1891, p. 3. s.a. "Chit Chat," Stage, February 12, 1891, p. 11. In the June 20, 1891 issue of Era, Barrett was interviewed about his opinions of Ibsen. "Mr. Wilson Barrett very truly says that the influence of Ibsen up to the present has been to confuse and bewilder authors, critics, and audiences alike. Realism, he holds, is permissible on the stage 'to any extent that does not annoy the audience or destroy an author's meaning.'" (p. 13.)

<sup>3</sup>Terry preferred classic roles to "Dr. Ibsen's foolish women." She thought Ibsen's plays were "preposterously unreal, untrue to nature." Ibsen's only attraction for players is the ease with which his plays are performed: "how much easier it is to ask for a bonnet to be removed from a chair than to offer naturally a kingdom for a horse!" ("Theatrical Gossip," Era, June 6, 1891, p. 8.)



contact with other Ibsenites before her performances. Her reputation did not profit from the attempt at *Ellida*, and she did not play Ibsen again.

Another revival of *A Doll's House* was given by Rose Norreys, a popular comic actress. Norreys wished to branch out into serious drama, and hoped to enjoy Ibsen's facility as an 'actress-maker' just as Achurch, Robins, Lea, and Wright had done. Norreys was well suited to the butterfly wife (the "macaroon-munching Doll," as 'Carados' called her),<sup>1</sup> and practiced the tarantella to perfection, but her background was detrimental for the Nora of the final scene.<sup>2</sup> After the matinee on June 2, she was unable to secure enough interest to justify taking a theatre; on June 30 she gave a single performance at Crystal Palace, and on July 16 gave a matinee at the Theatre Royal, Brighton. Norreys' depiction was appreciated by many critics, but although McCarthy claimed that her production gave new life to the Ibsen controversy, the lateness of the season and the profusion of Ibsen plays in the previous months counted against her. Her career failed after 1893, and she died in poverty and obscurity.

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<sup>1</sup>'Carados,' "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, May 31, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>McCarthy, alone among Ibsenites, thought Norreys admirable in the final scene: "She rendered admirably the frozen despair, the frozen determination of this fair young thing, this doll-wife, this baby-mother, before the sudden revelation in all its naked horror of a selfish man's soul." ("Pages on Plays," Gentleman's Magazine, July 1891, p. 102.)

When Shaw wrote to Charles Charrington about Ibsen events up to the 30th of March, he reported that several productions were promised, commenting that "in short, the idea is in the air that there is money in Ibsen," but Shaw was not concerned that the lesser artists would take Ibsen over completely or permanently:

It is true that the opportunity offered by the Ibsen boom to novices at scratch matinees will soon be as completely a thing of the past as amateur performances of Richard III; but it is just then that the turn of the skilful and distinguished actor will come. The long run system is being broken through now in all directions by all the actor managers who have any personal force; and since I suppose you intend to venture in that capacity when you return, it seems to me far more important that you should come back an accomplished artist, with a repertory of some extent and variety, than that you should rush home to catch the Ibsen boom.<sup>1</sup>

The Charringtons were scheduled to return to London before Christmas, and naturally the public expected that they would present A Doll's House.<sup>2</sup> Their return was delayed, and they were unable to revive the production until April, 1892. Consequently, London was without Ibsen performances for nine months following Norreys' appearance at Crystal Palace.

#### The Quintessence of Ibsenism

Once Ibsen had disappeared from the stage, Londoners had little reason to be concerned about him. His latest play had been thoroughly gone over. All the social plays were in translation and any new translations could only be of the poetic dramas (of little interest to

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<sup>1</sup>Laurence, 1965, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup>"Theatrical Gossip," Era, March 14, 1891, p. 10.

playgoers) or the immature plays (of little controversial potential). Theatrical critics had nothing to review. Under the circumstances, Ibsen seemed doomed to relapse into semi-obscurity. Yet one Ibsenite was unwilling to let the controversy pall.

Since December 1890, Bernard Shaw had planned to publish a re-worked version of the "Ibsen as a Socialist" talk that he gave for the Fabian Society in July. "When Ibsen's new play appears, I shall complete my paper by an analysis of it, and then set to in earnest to get it published."<sup>1</sup> His original idea was to present the book as Shaw's Tales from Ibsen, corresponding to the Lambs' Tales from Shakespeare,<sup>2</sup> but instead he decided to write an account explaining how and why some English people recognized in Ibsen a genius of the highest order while others denounced him as revolting and described him in obscene terms.<sup>3</sup> The resultant book -- a jumbled mixture of philosophy, political theory, literary criticism, personal testimony, theatrical history, and social comment -- was called The Quintessence of Ibsenism.<sup>4</sup> Shaw began work on March 16, and laboured steadily for a month so that it might be ready for publication just at the time that the Ibsen debate needed reviving. Two publishers were interested: Fisher Unwin (who had published Marx Aveling's translation of The Lady

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from G.B. Shaw to Jules Magny, December 16, 1890, in Laurence, 1965, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from G.B. Shaw to T. Fisher Unwin, March 4, 1891, Laurence, 1965, p. 285.

<sup>3</sup>The Quintessence of Ibsenism (1891, rpt. London: Constable, 1932), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>The title was probably inspired by A.E. Schaffle's The Quintessence of Socialism, which was reviewed in To-day in March 1889, and which went into a second English edition in 1890. (Wisenthal, 1979, p. 38, and Britain, 1978, p. 389.)

from the Sea) and Walter Scott (who had issued Shaw's novel Cashel Byron's Profession and his Fabian Essays). Shaw ultimately signed with Scott,<sup>1</sup> and by May 12 the first batch of proofs was being corrected.<sup>2</sup> The book received its final check on July 20, and on August 15, Scott sent Shaw one of the first assembled copies. The delay of publication until October is inexplicable: Scott may have wanted to revive discussion of Ibsen, but he was probably too late. The book attracted comment from William Archer (who wrote an open letter to Shaw for the November issue of the New Review), Henry Irving, and Robert Buchanan, but otherwise the publication was little noticed.<sup>3</sup> The Era reported

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<sup>1</sup>For Shaw's reasons see letters to Fisher Unwin, April 22, March 19, 1891 (Laurence, 1965, pp. 293).

<sup>2</sup>Shaw Diaries.

<sup>3</sup>William Archer, "'The Quintessence of Ibsenism' An Open Letter to George Bernard Shaw," New Review, November 1891, pp. 463-9. Irving referred to the Quintessence in a speech to the Liverpool Philomathic Society on October 14, 1891. He is quoted as saying: "I have been reading lately a little book about what is called 'Ibsenism,' and I learn, in the polite language of the writer, that 'Our finished actors and actresses cannot play Ibsen because they are ignoramuses' (Laughter). I thought that some of our younger actresses played Ibsen rather well, though this, it seems, is because they are novices in art but experienced in what is called 'the political and social movement.' Outside this mysterious 'movement' you find 'inevitably sentimental actresses,' we are told, who are quite good enough for Shakespeare, but not educated enough for Ibsen (laughter). I understand from this authority that one of the qualifications for playing Ibsen is to have no fear of making yourself 'acutely ridiculous,' and I can easily believe that this exponent of Ibsen is not troubled by that kind of trepidation (laughter)....It is certainly a ludicrous pretension that the fitness to play Shakespeare disqualifies an artist for embodying the creations of some dramatist who is supposed to represent 'a political and social movement.' I don't know if the Ibsen drama will obtain any permanent standing on our stage, but it is a comfort to find that in the opinion of the author I have quoted[,] Shakespeare will not be entirely extinguished by the genius who is to show us that we are 'ignoramuses' (laughter). When I read these positive statements that the intellectual playgoer is to discard this or that system, and that great dramatic artists are to be suckled on Norwegian philosophy and trained to the heroism of making themselves 'acutely ridiculous', I am really grateful to the man who beguiles the path of an extremely difficult art with such entertaining suggestions (laughter)....Possibly it may be that I am of

that "everybody is reading Mr. Bernard Shaw's brilliant Quintessence of Ibsenism," but in fact only 2000 copies were sold by 1897.<sup>4</sup> The book's fame is mainly a twentieth century development, created by the enlarged editions published after Shaw had attained world renown as a dramatist and personality, so it will not be dealt with at length here.

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 too sanguine a temperament, but I cannot share the lugubrious views so freely expressed by certain modern writers with regard to either the present or the future of our stage." ("Banquet to Mr. Henry Irving," Liverpool Daily Post, October 15, 1891, p. 5.) Two letters from Buchanan to Shaw are in the British Library. The first, dated October 26, 1891, reads: "I'm not an Ibsenite, but a 'critic with a wooden head.' I feel impelled, nevertheless, to tell you how much pleasure I've received from your Quintessence -- which I look upon as quite masterly statement of the case for the Defence. The only review I've seen describes your book as mystifying & intending to mystify. Nothing, I think, can be more untrue. It is strong, simple, & clear as crystal....Pardon me sending you this line. I shall, opportunity offering, say something in print about your book, and for what I do say I shall want more pardoning. All I wish to express now is an expression of a great interest in as fine a piece of polemical writing as I have read for many a day." (BL Add. MS 50529, fol. 179; s.a. fol. 181.) The significance of the Quintessence lies in its elucidation of Shaw's intellectual development, not Ibsen's, and so its worth with respect to the 1890s is primarily Shavian, not Ibsenian. For analyses of the Quintessence and the influence of Shavian Ibsenism, see L.B.W. Weisberg, "Ibsen and English Criticism: Early English Critical Reactions to Ibsen in England and Their Aftermath in Modern Ibsenism," Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 1972; Kenneth E. Jansen, "The Ibsen Movement in England: Ibsen Misunderstood," Ph.D. Diss., Ohio University, 1969; Harold Fromm, "Ibsen," in Bernard Shaw and the Theatre in the Nineties Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1967; Wisenthal, 1979; D.C. Gerould, "George Bernard Shaw's Criticism of Ibsen," Comparative Literature, Vol. 15, Spring 1963, pp. 130-45; and Britain, 1978, pp. 381-401.

<sup>4</sup>Wisenthal, 1979, p. 16. Even the forgettable work, Cashel Byron's Profession (published in London in 1889) sold 3193 copies by March 1891 (Laurence, 1965, p. 293.) This is in addition to the New York sales and the Modern Press, London, edition of 1886.) Two thousand may represent the total sales in Britain and the U.S.A. (see Laurence, 1965, p. 811). The price of the book was five shillings. Though six reprints of the Quintessence were published in New York between 1891 and 1913, none were published in London until the 1913 edition (revised up to the death of Ibsen).

Shaw's 'explanation' of Ibsen had little or no effect on playgoers' appreciation of Ibsen in the 90s, and little or no influence on critics beyond the Fabian enclave.

### Ibsenite Self-Criticism

Ibsenite response to Ibsen plays performed in 1891 constitutes a small proportion of the total response in the critical press. Of the inner circle of Ibsenites, Walkley, McCarthy, and Archer were the only ones who were employed as regular theatre critics. Walkley wrote for both the Speaker and Star, and McCarthy wrote regularly in the New Review, and Gentlemen's Magazine and sporadically in the Hawk and Black and White, but Archer kept quiet on the subject of Ibsenism, fearing that a conflict of interest would jeopardise his own or the World's reputation -- Shaw finally convinced him in April that his policy of silence and fair play did more harm than good to the credibility of the Ibsenite movement. As editor of the Playgoers' Review, Grein welcomed both anti-Ibsen and Ibsenite copy, the latter usually contributed by William Alison. Henry James and George Moore wrote articles on the production of Hedda Gabler,<sup>1</sup> but remained silent about the other performances. Several other critics emerged as 'conditional' Ibsenites (Joseph Knight, W. Davenport Adams, and the critics of the Daily Graphic, Gentlewoman, Queen, P.M.G., and Sunday

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<sup>1</sup>Henry James, "On the Occasion of 'Hedda Gabler,'" New Review, June 1891, pp. 519-30, rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 234-244; George Moore, "'Hedda Gabler' at the Vaudeville Theatre," St. James's Gazette, April 21, 1891, p. 5, rpt. St. James's Budget, April 24, 1891.

Times), selectively supporting certain productions depending on their 'palatability quotient.' The gains made for the Ibsenites by the 'palatable' productions of A Doll's House and Rosmersholm were lost because of Ghosts. The unusual qualities of Hedda Gabler aroused a considerable amount of positive comment, even among previously unsympathetic non-Ibsenites, but the comparatively mundane presentations of The Lady from the Sea and A Doll's House in May and June caused enthusiasm to fall off again.

In the reviews of Fraser's Doll's House, two 'conditional' Ibsenites (in the Globe and Daily Graphic) agreed with Walkley that Drummond and Herbert were inadequate as Helmer and Rank, and that Fulton and especially Robins were excellent in their roles, but they differed from Walkley's belief that Fraser was weakest in the final scene just where strength and resolve were required. Even so, the acting in A Doll's House was thought to be creditable, and as Walkley observed, "everybody was obviously in earnest, put on their mettle, it seemed, by the chance of having to appear for once in a real play; and if there were one or two failures...this was evidently not through want of careful and intelligent study."<sup>1</sup>

The acting in Rosmersholm was not regarded as highly by the Ibsenites. Farr was not an ideal Rebecca, and attracted only modest praise. There was no consensus about Benson's acting, as he was thought to be both too highly keyed and too exaggeratedly weak by

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<sup>1</sup>'Spectator' [A.B. Walkley], "The Theatre. A Doll's House at Terry's," Star, January 28, 1891, p. 2.

different critics. Ibsenites stressed that Ibsen's plays require great actors, and that second-string casts could never produce satisfactory work.

Many of the Ibsenites' Ghosts reviews are actually defences of the play, the producer, and the actors against the charges of the anti-Ibsen critics. In three separate reviews of the performance, McCarthy pleaded for the use of more temperate language,<sup>1</sup> he argued that the vehemence of anti-Ibsen response was proof of Ghosts' importance and Ibsen's influence,<sup>2</sup> and likens Ghosts battle of naturalism over romanticism to Hernani's battle of romanticism against classicism.<sup>3</sup> McCarthy defended Ghosts as a great play by a man of genius, but Joseph Knight, who previously wrote in favour of Ibsen, accused the play of being dull, undramatic, revolting, and amateurish. Nevertheless, though he agreed with non-Ibsenites that there was cause to object to the play, he chastised them for employing extreme language:

Ibsen's 'Ghosts' has provoked a good deal of censure. It is an uncomfortable and, in a sense, unclean piece, against the public production of which men may reasonably protest. To use, however, concerning it language so violent as has been recently employed is as unjust as it is silly. The subject of 'Ghosts' is unsuited to dramatic exposition, or, indeed, to presentation in any popular form. The play, none the less, has scarcely an objectional passage, and, so far from being prurient, it points a lesson of Puritan sternness.<sup>4</sup>

Walkley and Moore regarded intemperate response to Ghosts as proof of the corruption and degradation of theatrical journalism:

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<sup>1</sup>J.H. McCarthy, "Pages on Plays," Gentleman's Magazine, May 1891, p. 537.

<sup>2</sup>"Books and Plays," New Review, April 1891, p. 383.

<sup>3</sup>J.H. McCarthy, "Ibsen's Ghosts: -- From Two Points of View," Black and White, March 21, 1891, p. 222.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Knight, "Drama. The Week," Athenaeum, March 21, 1891, p. 387.



[Ibsen] has exposed for us the hollow incompetence of current dramatic criticism, its lack of insight, its shallow conventionalism, its dense impenetrability to ideas. The breakdown of the London press over Ghosts will come as a surprise only to those who are not familiar with the class of men by whom the old school of editors...are content to be represented in the play-house....It is because of its dependence on the great public that the drama remains the lowest, the most jejune, the most trivial of the arts. And It is because Ghosts hits this great public full in the face, straight between the eyes, that the great public's self-elected representatives have raised their outcry.<sup>1</sup>

Walkley wrote ironically about anti-Ibsen response, ridiculing the anti-Ibsen faction for their lack of perception and failure to see Ghosts as a great spiritual drama, and for their short-sightedness in trying to suppress a play that subverts "all that makes London life wholesome and sacred -- the Bayswater Omnibuses, the Temple Bar Griffin, Trial by Jury, and the Pelican Club."<sup>2</sup> He was delighted when prophecies of fire and brimstone were disproved.

Joseph Knight, once more in the Ibsenite fold, unconditionally welcomed the production of Hedda Gabler, a play that "gains in intelligibility from interpretation."<sup>3</sup> Neither Archer nor McCarthy had predicted that Robins would succeed as Hedda; Archer had not expected Robins' range to stretch from the mild Martha Bernick and Mrs. Linden to the feline Hedda, but he later admitted the feasibility of her characterization. McCarthy, alone among critics, insisted that Robins'

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<sup>1</sup>A.B. Walkley, "The Drama," Speaker, March 21, 1891, p. 340. s.a. George Moore, "Our Dramatic Critics," P.M.G., September 9, 1891, pp. 1-2, and September 10, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>'Spectator' [A.B. Walkley], "Spectator's' Dramatic Notes," Star, March 14, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Knight, Athenaeum, April 25, 1891, p. 546.

interpretation did not obey Ibsen's intentions. His disappointment stemmed from what he thought was Robins' deliberate sabotage of Ibsen's purpose by playing to suit popular tastes.

...if Miss Robins does not play Ibsen's Hedda Gabler, she does not do so, not from artistic incapacity either to understand or to create the character, but of deliberate, and, as I think, most regrettable purpose. It seems to me as if Miss Robins had recognized the difficulty that always must exist in presenting an Ibsen play to the English public, had rightly estimated the hostility that the attempt must encounter, and had played for success by lowering the artistic level of the play. The result is that her Hedda Gabler is a very melodramatic, highly effective creation, ingeniously calculated to interest, even to appeal to the sympathies of London audiences, but far too obvious, too harsh, too showy for the super-subtle 'White Devil' of Ibsen's drama.<sup>1</sup>

According to McCarthy, Robins and Lea were praised at the expense of the play itself, and he argued that by grossly misinterpreting Hedda Gabler, Ibsenite critics did more harm than good. Despite such differences in interpretation, all Ibsenites agreed that Hedda Gabler was London's best Ibsen production to date.

Hedda Gabler won a glowing review from the critic of the Sunday Times, who was completely won over by Robins and Lea. He had hovered at the brink of Ibsenism, regarding certain qualities in previous productions to be objectionable, but he thought Hedda Gabler "one of the most notable events in the history of the modern stage, for, in spite of all prejudice and opposition, it marks an epoch and clinches an influence."<sup>2</sup> Ibsenite critics expressed something like relief and

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<sup>1</sup>J.H. McCarthy, "Pages on Plays," Gentleman's Magazine, June 1891, p. 638. s.a. J.H. McCarthy, "Hedda Gabler," Hawk, April 28, 1891, pp. 461-2; and "Ibsen's Hedda Gabler at the Vaudeville," Black and White, April 25, 1891, p. 382, partially rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 221-2.

<sup>2</sup>"Plays and Players," Sunday Times, April 26, 1891, p. 7, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 229.

satisfaction that Hedda Gabler was received so favourably -- even by the anti-Ibsen critics who were outraged by Ghosts -- and gained confidence about Ibsen's prospects in England.

This optimism was cut short, however, by the later performances of The Lady from the Sea and A Doll's House. Ibsenites agreed that Mellor and her company were incapable of doing justice to The Lady from the Sea, a play requiring genius to realize its poeticism successfully. Walkley was somewhat reluctant to laud the play because of the incongruity between Ellida and her nineteenth century surroundings and Ibsen's limited success in combining poetry and sociology, though he concluded that "No final judgment...can be pronounced on the play until it has been properly played."<sup>1</sup> The Sunday Times critic reverted to anti-Ibsenism, regarding the play as incomprehensible, incongruous, commonplace, and dull on the stage: "Just as the 'Hedda Gabler' representation by its excellence excited the intense interest of even those who failed to admire the play itself, so the depressing performance of 'The Lady from the Sea' at Terry's damped the enthusiasm of even the most ardent Ibsenites."<sup>2</sup>

Few Ibsenites bothered to review Rose Norreys' matinee of A Doll's House. Knight complimented Norreys, especially for the tarantella, and mentioned that she had "fairly competent support."<sup>3</sup> The only other Ibsenite reviews of the performance collected for this study are by Walkley and McCarthy. In the Speaker, Walkley briefly stated that Norreys was only half successful as Nora, and in the Star, he

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<sup>1</sup>A.B. Walkley, "The Drama," Speaker, May 16, 1891, p. 582.

<sup>2</sup>"Plays and Players," Sunday Times, May 17, 1891, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Athenaeum, June 6, 1891, p. 742.

called Norreys's performance creditable but not to his taste, as her manner was "a little EXPLOSIVE AND HYSTERICAL" in the third act.<sup>1</sup> The pace was too slow for him, the stage management was faulty in places, and the supporting cast's performances were uneven. McCarthy admired Norreys' performance because she felt enthusiasm for her author, her appearance was suited to the part, and she had artistic sympathy with the play.<sup>2</sup>

Considering their scratch production conditions and matinee billing, Rosmersholm and the January Doll's House received a disproportionate amount of attention in the press, but although Ibsenites were encouraged by this and by the fact that Ibsen was being presented at all, they complained about the inadequate staging and acting. Low production standards did not worry Walkley and McCarthy, however, for they valued actors' enthusiasm more than superior skills, and recognized that without the cooperation of actors, Ibsen could never be given a chance on the English stage. Critics stressed the importance of the New Drama and the significance of these Ibsen premieres, but questioned whether it was desirable for Ibsen to become a popular dramatist, appreciated by a mass audience; his potential for influencing other playwrights was applauded, but it was feared that if he became a popular or even semi-popular writer his artistic credibility would necessarily be jeopardized. This seems to have been the basis of Archer's and McCarthy's quarrel over the staging of Hedda Gabler and the 'truthfulness' of Robins' interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup>'Spectator' [A.B. Walkley], "The Theatre," Speaker, June 3, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>See J.H. McCarthy, "Pages on Plays," Gentleman's Magazine, July 1891, p. 100.

More serious quarrels developed between Ibsenites and non-Ibsenites, and even after the January matinee of A Doll's House it was apparent that the vitriolic anti-Ibsenism so well known in other countries was emerging in the English press. The extreme reactionary view, which was infrequently voiced over other productions, almost monopolized response to Ghosts. The Playgoers' Review was particularly conscious of anti-Ibsen activity and throughout the season collated anthologies of some of the choicest passages from London and provincial papers. In the following chapter, the phenomenon of anti-Ibsenism is documented, and some of its expositors and characteristics are catalogued. Along with the intemperance and mud-slinging came numerous attempts at parody and burlesque, and this manifestation of non-Ibsenite activity is also recorded.

CHAPTER FIVE  
THE NON-IBSENITES

...in dealing with the representatives of the press...  
Mr ARCHER displays the strangest symptoms....Doubtless the attitude of some of them with regard to Ghosts was ill-judged and undignified. There was hysteria when there should have been argument, abuse where cool, logical analysis was demanded. But, as a matter of fact, the opinions of the press on Ghosts varied to every shade. And, it may well be asked, why were the critics invited to the performances of IBSEN'S play, if not to express their opinions of it -- Surely there may be two opinions about Ghosts?....A thinks Ghosts is a masterpiece, B thinks it dull and dirty. If that is B's opinion, why should he not express it?...though A cannot prove the piece to be a masterpiece, B can quote passages from it in which incest is condoned, fornication argued in favour of, and adultery, in certain circumstances, recommended. Why, then should Mr ARCHER jump to the conclusion that every person who is not of the same opinion as himself about IBSEN necessarily be an ignoramus? (November 1891)<sup>1</sup>

Unlike the Ibsenites, anti-Ibsen partisans did not form any kind of a network for disseminating their views or for initiating anti-Ibsen projects. Because they were in the moral and numerical majority they found ample reinforcement for their beliefs in the institutions of home and church, and unrestricted access to the pages of almost all journals. How could they fail to impress their ideas when the Academy, Daily Chronicle, Daily News, Daily Telegraph, Era,

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<sup>1</sup>"Mr. Archer and the Critics," Leading article in Era, November 14, 1891, p. 15.

Evening News and Post, Evening Standard, Gentlewoman, Globe, Graphic, Illustrated London News (I.L.N.), Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News (I.S.D.N.), Morning Advertiser, Morning Post, Observer, People, Queen, Referee, St. James's Gazette, Saturday Review, Stage, Standard, Sunday Times, Theatre, Times, and Truth battled against the puny forces of the Athenaeum, Gentlemen's Magazine, New Review, Speaker, Star, and World? In 1891, anti-Ibsenism was more of an attitude than a philosophy, and its expression was a spontaneous, uncoordinated response to Ibsen, and not a systematized methodology or movement.

Anti-Ibsenism found expression quite haphazardly, and, since most theatre journalists wrote anonymously, it also flourished (for the most part) without real leaders and followers. Clement Scott represented 'old criticism' to countless playgoers, but his influence on other critics and on audiences' playgoing habits insofar as Ibsen is concerned is undemonstrable.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the concept of Scott as the archetypal anti-Ibsen critic is misleading, for 'anti-Ibsenism' is an indefinite term encompassing many viewpoints -- some of which differ markedly from Scott's own opinions. His criticism exemplifies

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<sup>1</sup>Scott's reputed influence on the success or failure of new plays is considered for the period March 1, 1895 to March 1, 1896 in "Our Watch Tower. The Criticism of the Daily Telegraph" (Theatre, April 1896, pp. 187-93), where he is found to have a negligible effect on playgoing habits during the period. His criticism was the most widely read (circulation of the Daily Telegraph was 100,000, and its weekly sales amounted to half a million more copies than any other morning paper in the world), but it competed with twenty eight other morning and evening papers every day in London. Scott's opinions may have been highly regarded by actors and managers, and by the playgoers in the audience with him, but they were less important to readers of first night notices. c.f. the appendix to the first edition of Shaw's, The Quintessence of Ibsenism, rpt. Shaw, 1958 , pp. 13-14.

anti-Ibsenism, but it certainly does not represent a definitive manifestation. His criticism is of a higher quality than many of his colleagues' but his quotability does not make him an epitomizer.

Nevertheless, Scott's notoriety as theatre critic for at least three journals, his long-standing reputation as the doyen of theatre journalists, and his thirty years' experience in the critical chair forced him to prominence in the Ibsen controversy. When a mass of anti-Ibsen criticism accumulated, particularly after Ghosts, Ibsenites designated Scott as their most prominent opponent, and directed their anger at him. Similarly, when non-Ibsenites required someone to represent their collective cause (as Archer represented, for the public, the cause of Ibsenism) they too selected Scott. Thus, he became figurehead of all non-Ibsenite opinion. His fellow journalists frequently referred to his criticism and often called on him when their own store of dogmatic aphorism expired, but they did not forego their own independence entirely, and rarely hesitated to state their own divergent opinions. Much of this chapter is devoted to detailing the independent response of non-Ibsenite critics.

Twentieth-century theatre historians often blur even the roughest of outlines that characterize early English reaction to Ibsen. Almost a hundred years later, the topical vogue that surrounded Ibsen's name and the many shades of grey that represented opinion about his work in 1891 have been largely forgotten and merged into one mass of blackness.

The view that all of Ibsen's plays were received very, very badly by almost all of the critic press and all of the public, and that Hedda Gabler, Ghosts, Rosmersholm, etc. were put in cold storage until the



liberating influences of Edwardianism and World War I enabled Britons to appreciate Ibsen is a gross, distorting over-simplification of events. It was the view proffered by Ibsenites in the 1890s to account for the failure of the playwriting revolution, and to relieve the frustration they felt when every one of their pro-Ibsen articles was countered by nine or ten anti-Ibsen articles. It was also the view encouraged by traditionalists who wished to portray their victory over the New Drama as absolute. But this view is neither sacrosanct nor correct. Victorian philistinism is traditionally blamed as the blind persecutor of the 'father of modern drama' because the unbandaging of 'filthy social sores' proved intolerable to late nineteenth-century prudery. Psychologically and politically minded apologists use sexual repression and guilt over class exploitation to account for the (perceived) single-minded indignation Victorians expressed over Ibsen's plays and all that they represented. But Ibsenites' successes, however limited they were in 1891, helped to break down the credibility of old journalism and of playgoing philistinism, and caused some of the public to question the principles of critics like Scott, J.F. Nesbit, Alfred Watson, Frederick Wedmore, Moy Thomas, Edward Morton, and E.A. Bendall, who had discredited their authority and prestige among serious playgoers by reacting so intemperately to Ghosts.<sup>1</sup> Even Scott came

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<sup>1</sup>The Hawk of June 9, 1891 drew attention to a French farce reviewed in the "Paris Day by Day" column of the Daily Telegraph, June 8, 1891. Leurs Filles, by Maurice de Cortellier, produced at the Théâtre Libre, was called "a charming little comedy" and "a sparkling little trifle" by Scott. The plot concerns a mother who, wishing to have the house free for a romantic entanglement with Georges de Vefuge, packs her seventeen year old daughter off to a convent. In the meantime, Mdme. becomes friendly with a woman of infamous reputation and gains more admirers than she had originally planned on. The daughter runs away from the convent

under censure in the spring season, thanks to the campaigning of the Ibsenites, whose term 'Clement Scottism' became synonymous with vagueness of thought and superficiality of argument.

"Ghosts and Gibberings," an article written by William Archer for the P.M.G. of April 8,<sup>1</sup> and partially reprinted in every edition of Shaw's Quintessence of Ibsenism, is largely responsible for perpetuation of the mistaken view that anti-Ghosts response is indicative of nineteenth-century criticism. The article consists of a collection of derogatory statements about Ghosts; Archer claimed that this was a modest taste of his forthcoming book, Ibsenoclasts: or, an Anthology of Abuse, for which material poured in every day.<sup>2</sup> The most vituperative comments of the anti-Ibsen press were immortalized by this article, with Ibsen as "a teacher of the aestheticism of the Lock Hospital" (Saturday Review), with Ibsenites as "educated and muck-ferreting dogs....effeminate men and male women....[who] know they are doing not only a nasty but an illegal thing" (Truth), and with Ghosts as "an open drain...a loathsome sore unbandaged...a dirty act done publicly; or...a lazar house with all its doors and windows open" (Scott's leading article in the Daily Telegraph). These few isolated comments on Ghosts, collated for greatest effect in order to reinforce

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because the other girls say her Maman fait la nice and because she has found an admirer herself; this admirer enters, and is none other than the aforementioned M. Vefuge. The daughter is sent to her room while Maman and Georges go in to dinner. "The subsequent entanglements of the amusing little story are left, as usual at the Theatre Libre, to the imagination of the audience." (p. 626.) This, points out 'Hawkshaw,' is the critic who objects to Ibsen!

<sup>1</sup>P.M.G., p. 3. Also in Egan, 1972, pp. 209-14.

<sup>2</sup>Archer was still collecting the abuse in 1893, when he gave a retrospective of Ibsen response in "The Mausoleum of Ibsen," Fortnightly Review, July 1893, pp. 77-91, rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 304-12.

Archer's contention that it was impossible to conduct a rational discussion about the play "with men whose first argument is howl for the police" have been mistaken as an accurate pastiche of response not only to Ghosts, but to all Ibsen drama during the 1890s. In fact, provisos regarding Ibsen's potential as a great dramatist and sly admissions of his positive influence on English drama are rife in non-Ibsenite criticism, and reveal a more considerate and tolerant press than Archer's "Manual of Malediction" of authors thrown into "moral epilepsy" portrays. Not all non-Ibsenite response was anti-Ibsen, and not all anti-Ibsen critics were unconditionally damning.

Ibsenites were justifiably frustrated by non-Ibsenites' inability to sustain their 'liberalism' long enough to act on it, however, and when response to Ghosts demonstrated that any 'progress' achieved in the previous years and months had been thrown to the four winds, Archer and his colleagues realized that it was no longer the case that "Ibsen on the English stage is impossible" (for his plays had already been performed several times) but that "English critics of Ibsen are incorrigible." In a letter submitted to the Playgoers' Club on the occasion of the reading of Ghosts, for example, Clement Scott wrote that "none can doubt the cleverness, the genius, the analytical power of the 'Master,'" <sup>1</sup> but a month later he called the same playwright an egotist and a bungler. Just two weeks before Ghosts was performed, Scott made the following comment:

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<sup>1</sup>From Scott's letter quoted in the Detroit Free Press, February 28, 1891, rpt. in William Archer's "Ghosts and Gibberings," in Egan, 1972, p. 213.

It seems to many of us a great pity that the discussion on Ibsen and all his works cannot be carried on with a little more exercise of temper and forbearance. It looks suspiciously like the knowledge of a weak cause when rude invective and coarse motive are flung at the heads of anyone who will not instantly consent to be influenced by that against which his common-sense rebels.<sup>1</sup>

Yet no one flung more rude invective than Clement Scott in the fortnight after Ghosts was performed. Archer reached an impasse with Scott and the anti-Ibsen critics but instead of fighting back with the same sort of accusations, he chose to demonstrate the foolishness of the opposition's approach. He reminded Scott that their beliefs were irrevocably different, and that name-calling was done "in the ardour of controversy, in the rapture of rhetoric" with the sincere belief that good art and morals were being upheld, and without conviction that a non-believer was actually "a 'muck-ferreting dog' [or] a 'mercenary charlatan.'"<sup>2</sup> But when the circumstances were reversed and Scott was confronted with unpleasant criticism of himself (e.g. Shaw's remarks at a Playgoer's Club meeting, and the controversial letter by 'Mr. Y,' a supporter of the independent theatre movement) he reacted indignantly.

Ibsenites and non-Ibsenites alike were convinced that their respective courses led ultimately to the only desirable end, and that they were working for the good of drama in the only acceptable manner. What "Ghosts and Gibberings" shows is that the old critics were totally convinced of the righteousness of their views and the justifiability of their means. Some critics expressed pride in their inclusion in "Ghosts and Gibberings" -- "It is charming reading," writes 'Momus,'

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<sup>1</sup>"The Playhouses," I.L.N., February 28, 1891, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup>See Ibid, and Archer, 1931, p. 194. Letter from Archer to Scott.

"and I am vain enough to rejoice that he gave my very own 'blinking owl,' and my 'nightmare' good places in his catalogue of curses"<sup>1</sup> --but the arguments of the new critics reached further than the intellectuals, and critics were compelled to reassess, if not reform, their outlook. "Ghosts and Gibberings" brought criticism of Ghosts to the fore equally with the play, and the excesses of Ghosts criticism could not be rationalized.

The anti-Ghosts response quickly became almost as controversial as the play that inspired it, and several weekly and monthly journals commented on the critical reaction, sometimes recommending certain critics above others, sometimes quoting passages, and sometimes suggesting that if everyone just forgot about the horrible issue Ibsen would fade away and everyone could be rational again. "Ghosts and Gibberings," commentary on the commentary, attracted its own commentators: the Playgoers' Review, for example, recommended Archer's compilation as useful for critics, authors, M.P.s, and "all who consider abuse the strongest of arguments," and playfully announced that the unabridged book of abuse would be dedicated "to 'the critical fraternity of England (with apologies to the select few who have praised Ibsen.'"<sup>2</sup> In the New Review, Henry James admired "Ghosts and Gibberings" for what it revealed about critical response to Ibsen.

This catalogue is a precious document, one of those things that the attentive spirit would not willingly let die. It is a thing, at any rate, to be kept long under one's hand, as a mine of suggestion and reference; for it illuminates, in this matter of the study of Ibsen, the second characteristic of our emotion (the first as I have mentioned, being its peculiar intensity): the fact that that emotion is

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<sup>1</sup>"Play-things," Gentlewoman, April 18, 1891, p. 526.

<sup>2</sup>Playgoers' Review, April 15, 1891, p. 139.

conspicuously and exclusively moral, one of those cries of outraged purity which have so often and so pathetically resounded through the Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>1</sup>

It was hardly any wonder that Archer despaired of finding intelligence among the critical fraternity -- he had reason to expect more temperate response from men who claimed to possess the faculty of reason -- but Archer was not alone in his surprise over the quality, if not the quantity, of the attacks.

Though criticism of Ghosts marks the apex of hostility and is not characteristic of all Ibsen response in the 90s, it served ultimately to discredit anti-Ibsenism. The publicity given to the play and its criticism drew attention to the critics, and caused readers and playgoers to look more carefully at their favourite reviewers' notices, and to make critics more aware of the necessity of observing critical principles when assessing subsequent Ibsen productions. Professionalism and impartiality were also questioned, and the Ibsenites made good mileage of their adversaries' indiscretions. George Moore, for example, exposed several dishonorable practices in his articles on dramatic criticism for the P.M.G. It was obvious to Moore that the financial motive was in evidence in anti-Ibsen writing:

Chicken, champagne, and purses of money do not come to the book reviewer; the dramatic critic has only to stretch out his plate, his glass, and his hand, and, hey presto! all three are filled. Is it, therefore, astonishing that we find him resisting all efforts at reformation? I do not mean he is aware that in attacking Ibsen he is defending the material comforts and luxuries of his life: men do not act from reason, but from instinct, and just as the peasant is afraid of machinery the dramatic critic feels if the public were

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<sup>1</sup>Henry James, "On the Occasion of Hedda Gabler," New Review, June 1891, rpt. in Essays in London and Elsewhere, p. 245, and in Egan, 1972, p. 236.

allowed to admire Ibsen it might care very little for the tawdry ware that at present holds the theatrical market, and from which he draws so comfortable a living.<sup>1</sup>

Moore pointed out the absurd fears of the Times' and the Standard's critics, but especially denounced Scott's preliminary notes to Ghosts. In his regular Friday morning column of notes and news, Scott introduced the I.T.S.'s forthcoming play in such a way as to incite public indignation, while insinuating that the Examiner of Plays was neglecting his duties. The financial motive was again in operation.

Then, after some paragraphs about nothing in particular, there came one about the Théâtre Libre in Paris, and just as an item of news it was recorded that certain lines in a play lately given in that theatre had so grievously shocked those who had attended the general rehearsal that Antoine had ordered their excision. The inference, of course, was that if the new society was not put down some such play would soon be announced for performance in London. Now, as it is well known that the Théâtre Libre in Paris has drawn much attention away from the regular theatres, and remembering that the Telegraph derives a larger income from theatrical advertisements than any other morning paper, it becomes difficult not to suspect that these malevolent paragraphs were written rather in the business interests of theatrical managers than from a genuine fear of the part of the patentees of "Is Marriage a Failure?" that public morality might be tainted by a private performance of "Ghosts."<sup>2</sup>

In an article entitled "Ghosts and the Reptile Press," William Alison expressed surprise at the incompetence and stupidity that dominated press reaction. He did not object to the adjectives applied to Ghosts, but regretted the damage done to the reputations of non-Ibsenite critics by their intemperance and misplaced protectionism:

Good, downright, honest vituperation we do not object to. It relieves the feelings of our opponents and advertises our movement; but at the same time a large number of very able writers...have been content to prostitute their splendid

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<sup>1</sup>George Moore, "Our Dramatic Critics II," P.M.G., September 10, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

talents by lying and misrepresentation, to suit the views of the pork-souled British householders who buy their newspapers, and this no honest man can regard without disgust.<sup>1</sup>

If the Daily Telegraph did not wish to risk being closed as an obscene publication, that was all right with Alison, but he regretted that Scott gave a false impression of the play and that his criticism "was gratuitously abominable and disgusting...[and] unscrupulously mendacious." Attempts to summon the Lord Chamberlain's intervention were a "degradation of criticism," according to Alison, and if that wasn't bad enough, "what are we to say of the inquisitorial spirit of intolerance shown by those who have endeavoured to suppress by force an artistic movement which happens to be distasteful to them?"<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, in their reviews of other Ibsen productions, non-Ibsenites were usually willing (though not always able) to give Ibsen what they considered to be a fair hearing, and even Clement Scott confessed that "I am sure there is not a greater admirer of Ibsen's talent -- nay, genius -- than I am" in a review of Rosmersholm.<sup>3</sup> When exposed to the diversified Ibsen fare of 1891, non-Ibsenite critics realized that Ibsen did not just 'stand for' heredity, female emancipation, or the inclusion of social issues in stage literature, but discovered that he was a many-sided writer whose innovative structural techniques, characterization, dialogue, tone, and intellectuality had to be dealt with too -- especially if the critic was to maintain (or establish) a reputation for critical acumen and

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<sup>1</sup>William Alison, "Ghosts and the Reptile Press," Playgoers' Review, April 15, 1891, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>"The Playhouses," I.L.N., February 28, 1891, p. 290.



credibility amidst the 'new critics.' Non-Ibsenite critics' influence on thinking playgoers was undermined by the analytical practices of the 'new criticism' -- a movement whose chief advocates happened to include members of the inner circle of Ibsenites: Archer, Walkley, and McCarthy. The new critics were literary men, widely and well educated in all the arts, with the specialized and exhaustive knowledge of world drama that gave them authority to evaluate theatre as art and not just as entertainment. If non-Ibsenites were to compete and survive, they knew they must adopt a more judicious aspect, even if most of their opinions remained unchanged.

Response to Ibsenite Projects -- "A Doll's House" (January)

By the time A Doll's House was revived in January 1891, non-Ibsenite critics had tired of declaiming the follies of the wayward Nora Helmer and the improper Dr. Rank. The play had been discussed at great length, and almost all the critics who were assigned to review the matinee had seen Achurch and Charrington in the play eighteen months before. Punch's critic was the only one to suggest that A Doll's House should be spared discussion and performance.<sup>1</sup> Far from being a potent source of evil, however, it seems that it was without substance: the Hawk called it an "incongruous charade," and the Era marvelled "once more upon the ridiculous size of the mouse the dramatist has got out of his very pretentious mountain."<sup>2</sup> Punch called

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<sup>1</sup>"Play time for A Doll's House," Punch, February 7, 1891, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup>'Hawkshaw,' Hawk, February 3, 1891, p. 123; and "A Doll's House," Era, January 31, 1891, p. 10.

it a "miserable drama, utterly devoid of dramatic interest," and the Observer's critic received the impression that Nora was "suffering from an acute attack of nervous hysteria" during the final act.<sup>1</sup> Moy Thomas, in the Daily News, wrote that "nothing will persuade me that a dramatist not quite mad would ever have written such silly and sorry stuff as that if he had not been driven to it by the discovery that it is not safe to leave anything to the imagination of obtuse spectators," but the only comment keenly insulting to the Ibsenite spectators came from 'Carados,' in the Referee, where he described the Freethinkers in the audience as "chiefly represented by women" who were visually and personally displeasing due to their desire to adopt masculine attributes.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Rank's "absolutely nauseous" speech describing his legacy of disease still inspired indignation, and Clement Scott jokingly wrote that if he dared even to quote the speech he would be in trouble with both the real Mr. Sydney Grundy and the mythical Mrs. Grundy.<sup>3</sup> Most critics agreed that the "pessimistic sermon" of the play was unenter-  
taining, with its wealth of talk and dearth of action, but even though the critics found the play unconvincing as drama and as an evangelical

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<sup>1</sup>Punch, *op cit.*; and "At the Play," Observer, February 1, 1891, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>"The Theatres," Daily News, February 2, 1891, p. 2; and "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, February 1, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Scott alludes to his recent exchange of letters with the playwright. See "The Playhouses," I.L.N., February 7, 1891, p. 190.

instrument of conversion to the 'Ibsen faith,' and though it missed the philistine raison d'etre of theatre by not being amusing, many admitted that they found it interesting on an intellectual level.<sup>1</sup>

Few of the reviews that actually included insulting remarks failed to counterbalance them with an equal or greater number of compliments. The Morning Post, for example, criticized Ibsen for proclaiming theories "antagonistic to English feeling" while admitting "that there is strong interest and originality in Ibsen's ideas."<sup>2</sup> The I.S.D.N. refused to accept "as either nature or art [Ibsen's] morbid studies of hysterical feminine disease," but admitted to "all the cleverness of the Norwegian dramatist's work, the swift subtlety of many of his touches, and the force of his exposition."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Saturday Review found Nora "restless and hysterical" from beginning to end, "and, let us say, exasperatingly unreal, and yet there are, so to speak, fragments of her personality which can be found in the character of almost every woman in the audience."<sup>4</sup>

Most of the reviewers commented on the acting rather than the text, and though critics disagreed about other performers' success, they unanimously agreed that Elizabeth Robins' portrayal of Mrs. Linden was a revelation. This 'second string' role had never commanded attention before. Robins infused the part with interest and vitality, much to everyone's surprise, as "no one conceived that [Linden] was

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<sup>1</sup>See "Between the Acts," Queen, February 7, 1891, p. 205; "Before the Footlights," Saturday Review, January 31, 1891, p. 136; and "Plays and Players," Sunday Times, February 1, 1891, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>"Terry's Theatre," Morning Post, January 28, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>"Terry's Theatre," I.S.D.N., January 31, 1891, p. 679.

<sup>4</sup>Saturday Review, op cit., p. 135.

really a woman of singularly emotional nature....[In] the scene between Mrs. Linden and Krogstad....Miss Robins...touched the keynote of genius. It was that acting -- so rare! -- that appeals so strongly to the sensibility that the actress has her audience at her mercy." She "was the very woman as Mrs. Linden" and her scene with Krogstad, altogether the best received and most memorable of the afternoon, was described as "sympathetic," and full of "healthy human feeling," in the "only really natural scene in the play."<sup>1</sup> The performance attracted comparisons with the Achurch production, and generally the critics felt that, except insofar as Robins was concerned, Fraser's production was inferior. While admitting to the tremendous difficulties presented by the lengthy and complex character of Nora, the critics of the Standard, Saturday Review, and Hawk admired Fraser's acting and the consistent engagement of both her brain and her heart in the work. But her experience did not yet match her talent. The Evening News and Post and Daily Chronicle believed that Fraser acted well in the light, frivolous scenes of the early part of the play, but that she "did not quite realise the sullen determination that makes it clear the doll-wife will quit husband and children,"<sup>2</sup> though the Morning Post, Observer, and Referee took the opposite view.

Forbes-Drummond's acting received moderate approval as well as complaints that he was unexceptional, that he talked and walked like Torvald Helmer but the character was beyond his capabilities, that his priggishness was offensive but that his preachy line delivery was even

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<sup>1</sup>C. Scott, "Terry's Theatre," Daily Telegraph, January 28, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>"Terry's Theatre," Daily Chronicle, January 28, 1891, p. 5.

more so, that he failed to give the part significance, that he was prosaic, unimaginative, colourless, and that his acting attracted the hearty laughter due a farcical comedy. At the moment of Nora's awakening, Fraser was, as it were, left alone on stage:

I think this extraordinary play would have gone infinitely better if C. Forbes Drummond more understood the character of Torwald [sic] Helmer. Granted that the bank manager is an utter prig; still, he should have some feeling, and there was not a scintillation of it shown.<sup>1</sup>

William Herbert, as Dr. Rank, was more subdued and less visually offensive than Charles Charrington had been in the same role, but response to him was mixed: the I.S.D.N. thought it kind of Herbert to remove Rank's "superfluously repulsive characteristics," and the Saturday Review felt that Herbert "wisely disobeyed Ibsen, and made of Dr. Rank a pleasant-looking young Englishman," but the Daily Telegraph, though grateful for Herbert's discretion to the ladies in the audience by not presenting an "emaciated, hollow-eyed, soft-voiced, and hot-handed sensualist, but merely a frank young Englishman," declared that this was no longer Ibsen's Dr. Rank, and the St. James's Gazette complained that the actor's discretion simply removed the character's meaning.<sup>2</sup> The Sunday Times found Herbert too cheerful for the dissipated doctor, and the Evening News and Post likewise felt that he was unconvincing. The critics praised Charles Fulton (Krogstad) for being thoroughly artistic, and commended his support of Elizabeth Robins in their scene.

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<sup>1</sup>"Dramatic and Musical Topics," Topical Times, January 31, 1891, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>I.S.D.N., op cit., p. 679; Saturday Review, op cit., pp. 135-6; and Daily Telegraph, op cit., p. 3.

Though some resistance to the idea of Nora leaving her family and home was evident, her example to womankind seemed much less threatening than in 1889. In 1891, the non-Ibsenite critics were content to find meaning in what already existed or to create alternative interpretations; the few critics who still objected simply labelled it as a piece of flawed writing, without becoming morally or artistically outraged by it and without insisting that it emanated from a depraved ideology. The Observer's critic received the impression that Nora was suffering only from a momentary attack of hysteria which she would be unable to recall in the morning, and that it was very unkind of Ibsen to have "her passing mood of morbid discontent stereotyped as a standing protest against the wrongs of butterfly wives at the hands of indulgent husbands."<sup>1</sup> The Daily News critic found the conclusion of the play wholly implausible, but not because real wives and mothers are incapable of abandoning their families.

...the only thing Mrs. Helmer desired was liberty to cultivate herself in accordance with the doctrines of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mr. Mill. Does anybody suppose that a lady who had developed such a will of her own that she was ready for anything, from separation to suicide, could not do all this under her own roof? Can we suppose that this most determined person, who in an instant reduces her imbecile lord and master to a condition of complete moral collapse would have been in any further danger from his fondling patronage? It is so clear that Mrs. Helmer's second thoughts would bring her back again that the author may reasonably have expected us to supply the rest. In accordance with the stage directions the play now ends with the 'dull sound' of the shutting of Mr. Helmer's street door, which, while it awakens awe and delight in the breasts of the faithful, causes the profane to laugh. Depend upon it, if the author

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<sup>1</sup>Observer, op cit., p. 7.

should ever condescend to write a sequel it will commence with a double rat-tat at that same street door -- preceded, possibly by the 'dull sound' of a four-wheeler.<sup>1</sup>

The correspondent for Punch, no doubt in an effort to be comical, expressed pleasure that the ending was written as it was, as "there was but one redeeming point in the play -- its conclusion. It ends happily in Nora, forger, liar, and -- hem -- wedded flirt, being separated from her innocent children."<sup>2</sup> A Doll's House seemed too genuinely threatening and the sanctity of home and hearth was too precious for such a remark to have been offered in jest in 1889.

-- Rosmersholm

Prior to the performance on February 23, commentary on Rosmersholm had been extremely limited, but the play's unusual construction, characters, and ideas were destined to attract harsh criticism. Nevertheless, of the reviews collected from twenty seven non-Ibsenite journals, only the Stage approximated the harshness of remarks in "Ghosts and Gibberings"; other critics levelled the same charges (accusing the play of provincialism, the characters' motives of obscurity, Rosmer and Rebecca of derangement, and the unlikelihood of non-Ibsenites fully understanding the play), but more temperately than the Stage and always within the context of Rosmersholm's exemplification of dramatic -- not psychiatric, medical, or any other -- art.<sup>3</sup> Non-Ibsenite critics' major objections centre on the strange motives

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<sup>1</sup>Daily News, op cit., p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Punch, op cit..

<sup>3</sup>"The Vaudeville," Stage, February 26, 1891, pp. 11-12.

behind characters' actions, the unusual characterizations, the veiled meaning of the drama, the prolixity of dialogue, and the absence of overt action -- in other words, the attributes that differentiate Rosmersholm from the tired formula of conventional playwriting. By Robertsonian standards of realism, unity, and congruity in the characterizations and plot construction, the play was a failure. The non-Ibsenite press did not like Rosmersholm, they did not enjoy watching it, and they were not 'converted' to Ibsenism by it, but most critics gave what was in their estimation a fair hearing, and criticized it on dramatic principles. Most critics treated the play respectfully, and a few treated it laughingly, but they spared it the insulting epithets showered on Ghosts, and in only two cases was the official censor mentioned.

The Sunday Times critic typified attempts to give Ibsen a 'fair hearing' in the manner of the new critics. He conceded that, like Whistler, Ibsen exerts a tremendous influence upon his art, and whether one welcomes that influence or not, one must recognize its existence. Ibsen must be regarded as an idealist and an impressionist, and not as a realist, because of the transcendent poetic quality that permeates his plays. The critic actually went so far as to dismiss the need for Pinerean 'plausibility':

It is only with this understanding that one can hope to appreciate the dramatist's ideas, and to reconcile those actual inconsistencies and moral monstrosities and improbabilities with which Ibsen's plays abound, such, for instance, as...Rebecca West...unexpectedly refusing to marry Rosmer, after all her treacherous efforts to win him, and again, these two incontinently committing suicide when matrimony should, according to ordinary usage, stare them in the face. But it is not according to the logic of actual life that Ibsen's creations act; rather is it in accordance



with an ideal that draws them as a magnet towards an end that may be imagined, but would scarcely occur in real life. But this is always a license of the dramatist and poet. It is not the ordinary that makes interesting romance, but the unusual and the unexpected. Rosmersholm is the play to reveal Ibsen in all his idealism, however its effects may jar upon our individual taste and senses. Therefore, in our opinion, the production of this extraordinary and absorbing, and, if you will, perplexing tragedy...was an event of far greater moment than the performances of A Doll's House or The Pillars of Society, for in Rosmersholm Ibsen the poet is manifest, and mystifying as some of the episodes may be, the poetry of this play explains the dramatist.<sup>1</sup>

Like the 'new critics,' the Sunday Times critic considered some of the popular objections to the play (especially its mystifying nature, the unorthodox construction, and the 'incomprehensibility' of the double suicide) and judiciously attempted to evaluate Rosmersholm according to the canons of dramatic art. He concluded that a real life adventuress would not have refused Rosmer's marriage proposal, but that Rebecca's decision was possible "by the light of this ideal of love's purifying power." He regarded the suicides as indicative of the "deeper poetry" of the play, infinitely more tragic than the laudanum or chloroform of melodrama. "We may not be satisfied; we may not even have on our visiting list many persons who would actually have behaved like this, but Ibsen, the poet and mystic, has worked out his ideal of sin's purification and expiation through love and death in this way, and matter-of-fact can have no say in the matter." He did not, however, appreciate Rosmersholm's structure, particularly the way that expository information is withheld until the last possible moment, but he admitted that this is a matter of personal taste and he did not

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<sup>1</sup>"Plays and Players. Rosmersholm," Sunday Times, March 1, 1891, p. 7, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 174.

presume to judge for other people. In his summation, he repeated his belief that for him, Ibsen's poetic transcendentalism illuminated facets that other critics found mystifying, though he found "the matter and the manner of the play weirdly morbid." He was thankful that Pinero, Jones, Gilbert, and Grundy flood the stage with sunshine, but admitted that Rosmersholm is "intensely interesting," and though it "is not a play to love and be glad with....It shines with the light of the midnight sun."<sup>1</sup>

Clement Scott also tried to emulate the 'new critics' in his I.L.N. review by seeking the good as well as the bad in Rosmersholm, but his prejudices proved insurmountable. He saw simplicity and "weird poetic beauty" in the language of the fourth act, and recognized the mark of a great playwright in Brendel's last scene, but this did not overcome his anathema to the play's subject, tone, and characters. He implored Ibsen to clarify his meaning, and insisted that it is not a sign of ignorance or unimaginativeness that the symbols and mystery of the play were not understood. If only Ibsen observed the wholesome tenets of playwriting, the great critic could have proclaimed the great dramatist:

Is it necessary to be consistently morbid in order to be occasionally unconventional? All through that last act we think what a wholesome poem of life Ibsen might write. We listen with genuine delight to such beautiful words....We love Rebecca and understand her when she says, 'But when I came to live alone with you here -- in quiet, in solitude --when you showed me all your thoughts without reserve -- every sweet and delicate mood, just as it came to you, then the great change came over me!' What a poet, I cry, who can write like this! But then I think of Beata killed for her great love, done to death because she was a woman, unmourned, nay scorned, because she loved 'not wisely but too well,' and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, pp. 175-6.

soon I see these two embracing Atheists going to their self-inflicted death with this blasphemy on their lips: 'There is no Judge over us, and therefore we must do justice on ourselves' -- and I wrap the fog from my throat and say -- 'No! It has not passed into your blood!'<sup>1</sup>

In the Daily Telegraph, Scott made it clear that he objected to Ibsen's divergence from the "old theory of playwriting" that aimed to tell a story as simply and directly as possible: he simply could not accept enigmas after a dénouement.<sup>2</sup>

Several other critics also required that Ibsen conform to conventional techniques before they could accept him. "I can only say," wrote the 'Captious Critic,' "if Ibsen, writing of heredity or of socialism or anything else, will give us plot and situation like other people...I will admire him as a dramatist whatever his theories. But if the theories are vague and the dramatic qualities wanting, I do not see much use of it at all."<sup>3</sup> The Saturday Review, in an effort to be modern and far-seeing, explained that "We do not in the least propose to judge this drama by any set rules, to complain that the story begins in the middle, that people are introduced who have nothing to do with the development of the plot...or to take exception to the eccentric treatment of episodes," but he complained that Ibsen's improbabilities are not off set by anything that is interesting or elevating, that the characters are impossible, and that the whole thing is meaningless.

The modern theory of play-writing, as adopted by Ibsenites, seems to be that a drama is worthless if you can understand what it is about, characters are too paltry to be put upon the stage if you know what they are doing, dialogue is merely contemptible if it possesses any obvious meaning.

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<sup>1</sup>Clement Scott, "The Playhouses," I.L.N., February 28, 1891, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup>Clement Scott, Daily Telegraph, February 24, 1891, p. 3, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup>"Rosmersholm," I.S.D.N., March 7, 1891, p. 893.

To endeavour to follow the mental meanderings of the shallow-brained Rosmer is truly a sorry task on which to waste an afternoon.<sup>1</sup>

This critic professed to welcome new forms but rejected all the possibilities submitted by Ibsen. Surely his admirers tolerated Ibsen's experiments because of his quirky foreignness: "If Ibsen were an English playwright," asked the Observer, "what, we wonder, would be urged in defence of his unconventional plan of telling his story backwards, and waiting until two-thirds of it are over before condescending to explain the motive of his central figure?"<sup>2</sup>

Non-Ibsenite critics were far from unanimous about all the defects of Rosmersholm. The Nation's reviewer thought the story interesting, "despite its somewhat childish talk about emancipation and freedom," but concluded that it is a story to be read, not acted. He complained that the antecedents are insufficiently explained, that the only incident of the play is delayed until the last moment, and that in the meantime Ibsen substitutes talk and nothing but talk.<sup>3</sup> The Stage acknowledged the poeticism of the dialogue, but complained that it is generally quite dull, while the I.S.D.N. despaired at its lengthiness, "its didactic pseudo-philosophy, its querulous pessimism, and its painful self-consciousness," despite its thoughtfulness and symbolism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Rosmersholm," Saturday Review, February 28, 1891, p. 258.

<sup>2</sup>"At the Play," Observer, March 1, 1891, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>'N.N.', "Ibsen's Rosmersholm," Nation, March 12, 1891, p. 216.

<sup>4</sup>"The Vaudeville," Stage, February 26, 1891, p. 11; and "Vaudeville Theatre," I.S.D.N., February 28, 1891, p. 843.

The Morning Advertiser appreciated the quality of the dialogue but criticized it for being false to human nature<sup>1</sup> -- a criticism that the Gentlewoman and other critics levelled at the entire play:

These things may be said and done in Norway, but we have no types either of individuals, or manners, or customs, or habits or conversation wherewith to compare them in England. To me these Ibsen creatures are 'neither men or women, they are ghouls,' vile, unlovable, unnatural, morbid monsters, and it were well indeed for society if all such went and drowned themselves at once....Their very existence, if true, is a reductio ad absurdum of Pessimism in its worst form, and that is dulness.<sup>2</sup>

The extent to which non-Ibsenites' unfavourable impressions of the play were blamed on a poor production differs. Moy Thomas conceded the possibility that Benson's performance may have helped to make the ending as absurd as a Gilbertian burlesque.<sup>3</sup> B.W. Findon, writing for the Playgoers' Review, claimed to be without prejudice for or against Ibsen; he thought the performance very poor and dragged out, but bought the text the next day and thought the play superb. In Rosmersholm, Ibsen goes "straight to the heart of humanity" though in performance it was not made clear to Findon that "the two central characters are instinct with life and feeling, and their truth must be acknowledged by every man and woman who recognises...that most of us are the creatures of circumstances..." because the play demands superb acting, and the cast was unable to supply it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Vaudeville Theatre," Morning Advertiser, February 24, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>'Momus,' "Rosmersholm," by Henrik Ibsen," Gentlewoman, February 28, 1891, p. 302.

<sup>3</sup>"Ibsen at the Vaudeville," Graphic, February 28, 1891, p. 243.

<sup>4</sup>B.W.F[indon], "Rosmersholm II," Playgoers' Review, March 16, 1891, p. 95.

Unlike the Doll's House reviews of the month before, critiques of Rosmersholm contain proportionally little comment upon the acting, though, as before, critics disagreed about the suitability and competence of the actors to deal with so challenging a play. The most consistent compliments were awarded Athol Forde, who seemed to capture Kroll's character, though the Evening News and Post and Daily News commented that he was handicapped by the silly lines and humorous effects Ibsen gives. As Peter Mortensgard, John Wheatman was generally thought to be adequate, though the Nation called him "a genteel Jack the Ripper" whose "first appearance convulsed the audience."<sup>1</sup> Few critics commented on May Protheroe's depiction of Mme. Helseth, but of those who did, most considered her performance satisfactory, though Findon (in the Playgoers' Review) and the Sunday Times critic wrote that her acting detracted from the potential impact of the final scene.<sup>2</sup> Charles Hudson's impersonation of Ulric Brendel was criticized because of his exaggerated depiction of drunkenness; it seems that he managed to make Brendel more intoxicated at the end of the scene than at the beginning without actually consuming alcoholic beverages, though the St. James's Gazette appreciated this comic relief.<sup>3</sup> The Sunday Times critic agreed with Clement Scott that Brendel was one of the best-written parts in modern drama, and regretted Hudson's failure to portray him, especially in his last scene. F.R. Benson was unimpressive as Rosmer: he was

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<sup>1</sup>Nation, op cit., p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>Playgoers' Review, op cit., p. 96. "How much more impressive...would the final episode have seemed had an actress of imagination and magnetism described the tragic catastrophe." (Sunday Times, op cit., p. 7, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 176.)

<sup>3</sup>"White Horses and Millpools. Ibsen at the Vaudeville," St. James's Gazette, February 24, 1891, p. 6.

accused of being weak, monotonous, wooden, and awkward as a "curate with cholera."<sup>1</sup> His predisposition to pose prompted the Nation to call him "a 'writhing right-angle" of contortions reminiscent of an old stage tragedian.<sup>2</sup> He appeared insincere, and detracted from the illusion that such a man could have attracted Rebecca West: "Remember," wrote Clement Scott, "he was mentally weak-kneed, not physically."<sup>3</sup> Scott praised Florence Farr as Rebecca, for, like Janet Achurch, she depicted the spirit of Ibsenism; in the confession scene in particular she was fully inside the character, and half the audience's interest in the play resulted from her deep earnestness.<sup>4</sup> The Stage thought she was "successful...in her embodiment of that sublimation of perversity, Rebecca," but the Referee interpreted her success as indicative of a personal want of delicacy and good taste.<sup>5</sup>

The play's need for excellent acting was generally acknowledged, and the Saturday Review, I.S.D.N., Observer, and Daily Telegraph stated that the performers met that need, while any incomprehensibility in the production was due to the play itself. The Playgoers' Review (Findon) and Sunday Times, however, felt that the failings of performance were due to the actors' inadequacies.

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<sup>1</sup>Sunday Times, op cit.

<sup>2</sup>Nation, op cit. The line drawings in the I.S.D.N. give evidence of Benson's gesturing. See Appendix D.

<sup>3</sup>Clement Scott, "The Playhouses," Daily Telegraph, February 28, 1891, p. 290.

<sup>4</sup>Clement Scott, "Vaudeville Theatre," Daily Telegraph, February 24, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup>Stage, op cit., p. 12. "Miss Florence Farr has avowed her preference for the part of Rebecca over all other parts. She talked of the uncontrollable desire for another woman's husband without blushing. This says much for her delicacy and good taste. Delicacy and good taste, you know, are the strong points in the Ibsen cult." ('Carados,' "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, March 1, 1891, p. 2.)

The Nation's conclusions represent a widely held attitude:

...the play was still interesting, notwithstanding the many drawbacks to its performance; that one would not willingly have missed it, though, given the same circumstances, one would not go to see it a second time -- there can be no doubt....It may be that 'Rosmersholm' is a fair type of the coming drama, and that ten or twenty years hence Ibsen will be looked up to by dramatists as master, just as Manet, despised by earlier generations, now is by artists, Zola by novelists. But in this case a new school of acting will have to be developed in England. Played by the average English actor of to-day, an Ibsen drama might be mistaken for a screaming farce.<sup>1</sup>

The acting in the next production, however, was generally praised: it seems that a new school of actors capable of playing Ibsen to perfection had suddenly been found. No one mistook Ghosts for a farce. Few non-Ibsenite critics had anything kind to say about the third Ibsen production of 1891, and they certainly did not admit that it was interesting or that they were pleased to have had the chance to see such a notorious play. If the subject of Ghosts was representative of the coming drama, critics could not predict that Ibsen would ever be revered.

-- Ghosts

Critics came closer to agreeing about the negative qualities of Ghosts than any other Ibsen production of the early nineties. Almost all non-Ibsenites agreed that this 'family drama in three acts' was dull, undramatic, repulsive, and depraved. The characters were universally unappreciated, and the motive was denounced. But this is not to say

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<sup>1</sup>Nation, op cit., p. 217.



that all the non-Ibsenite critics agreed on what its most loathsome characteristics were, about the best way to suppress the play, or even if suppression was the correct course. Ghosts attracted criticism in more newspapers than either of the previous Ibsen productions that year, and though reviews were often shorter than before (a necessity imposed by the critics' inability to crowd their criticism with detailed accounts of the plot and characters) there was more response to the script itself.<sup>1</sup> Previously, Ibsen reviews were padded with remarks about the acting, but Ghosts attracted little comment of this sort. Critics who had been inclined to admire or tolerate certain qualities in Ibsen while disapproving of the plays as a whole were less inclined to write charitably about Ghosts. Response to the production was immediate and terrible: of the forty three reviews collected for this study, thirteen of fourteen daily papers denounced the play, twenty of twenty two weekly reviews and newspapers disapproved (Life included one favourable and one unfavourable piece), two of four monthlies decried its merits (the other two reviews were written by McCarthy), and both theatrical annuals were disapproving. There was plenty of slander denouncing Ibsen, Ghosts, and the I.T.S. -- the material for Archer's anthology of abuse -- and the critical and gossip press carried accounts of the play and the controversy it created for a considerable time after the performance.

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<sup>1</sup>Even Edmund Yates, editor of the World, was incensed when Lady Colin Campbell's review of Ghosts was slipped into the paper while he was out of town. Shaw cites this incident in connection with accusations of journalists' corruption with respect to Ibsen. He asked Archer: "Was it his conscientious Puritanism or his countryhouse circulation that was imperilled then?" (Laurence, 1965, p. 322.)

As usual, on March 13, 1891, Clement Scott went directly from the evening performance to his office at the Daily Telegraph, where he wrote his first-night impressions for publication the following morning. "He could turn out his column-and-a-bit in an hour" and be home in bed before his review was required by the presses.<sup>1</sup> But early on the morning of March 14, Scott also wrote a leading article on Ghosts, augmenting the ideas expressed in his regular column. Very briefly, his review contains the following points: 1) there is little to directly offend in the dull drama that disappointed the scandal-mongers who had come to see a notorious play, 2) none of the play's faults can be blamed on the excellent acting -- Alice Wright was particularly good and provided the only interest in the hateful play, proving that "only the human scenes in Ibsen are worthy anything", because she attracted pity for Mrs. Alving, especially in her confession scene, 3) other performers, particularly Outram, were admirable, though the character of Oswald was sickening, 4) the play contains great ideas, but treated by a bad playwright these noble ideas are vulgarized, 5) the play is verbose, formless, pointless, uninteresting, and undramatic, 6) Grein forgets that England has had and still has great writers and that it is ahead of the Continent in literary production, therefore the I.T.S. is unnecessary and dramatists who desire fame should stay away from this new organization, and 7) it is more preferable to have no literary drama at all than to have Ghosts.<sup>2</sup> In the editorial, Scott developed different points: 1) the

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<sup>1</sup>S.R. Littlewood, The Art of Dramatic Criticism (London: Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1952), p. 126.

<sup>2</sup>Daily Telegraph, March 14, 1891, p. 3., rpt. Egan, 1972, pp. 187-8.

people of the I.T.S., encouraged by previous Ibsen productions to present a semi-secret performance of Ghosts, are dramatic art's deadliest enemies, 2) the I.T.S. received cash for the performance and so it will not escape the laws of Parliament that protect public morals -- the Royalty Theatre must lose its license, 3) people who value both the didactic and entertaining aspects of theatre should ensure that Ghosts is the I.T.S.'s last production, 4) Grein's description of the play as powerful, artistic, and reminiscent of Greek tragedy is quoted then discounted, point by point, 5) healthy-minded critics must agree that this exhibition of stripping human truthfulness and decency from corrupted hearts does not lead to higher Art but is fetid and loathsome, and art and common decency must join to disallow it, and 6) Ibsenites should keep these "clinical confessions" to themselves, otherwise public opinion (backed by the law, if necessary) will get rid of them.<sup>1</sup>

Unless Scott found time to discuss his reactions to the play with other anti-Ibsen critics at the Royalty (and what critic would leak his or her eagerly awaited reaction for all London to plagiarize?), other daily criticism must be regarded as fairly representative of individual critics' own response. Some other first night criticism by non-Ibsenites reflected Scott's views, but antithetical interpretations were also introduced. The Daily Chronicle, for example, applauded the ban imposed on Ghosts, for it demonstrated the value of the Lord Chamberlain's office as a public guardian. The Daily News welcomed

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<sup>1</sup>Leading article, Daily Telegraph, March 14, 1891, p. 5, rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 189-93.

Grein, "the young aspirant," and approved of his scheme to guide the English theatre, but expressed relief that the staple fare of the I.T.S. would not be as "terrible and...repulsive" as Ghosts.<sup>1</sup> The Globe admired the exemplary moral of the play, and recognized that

...it rises at one or two points into dramatic intensity, and there are times when it is touching. Its unpleasant motive is so skillfully handled that those who are ignorant of it on entering would probably have a very vague notion if any, at the close. Not one word is there to raise a blush, not a thought that could foster an evil inclination in the most vicious. Its teaching is, indeed, that the pleasant vices we mention ordinarily under euphemisms are in themselves sordid and squalid, a source not of enjoyment but of shame and disgrace.<sup>2</sup>

The St. James's Gazette, however, found the moral thoroughly repugnant, with its meaning utterly plain and recognizable. The Morning Advertiser admitted the possibility that Ghosts might have literary merit, while the P.M.G., judicious and noncommittal, stated that there is "nothing openly objectionable beyond the objectionable motive (if such it be)," that the play resembles Greek drama in some respects, and that it is artistic and moral.<sup>3</sup>

On the whole, the daily press (excluding the Star) was scandalized by Ghosts, and unrestrainedly said so in its columns. Humour infrequently appeared in the Ghosts controversy, though the Evening News and Post hastily assembled a poem burlesquing the experience of witnessing Ghosts, and a duologue between 'Our Critic' and a 'Budding Dramatic Author' that illustrates the general stupefaction over London's newest puzzle:

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<sup>1</sup> Daily News, March 14, 1891, p. 6, rpt. Egan, 1972, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> "The Independent Theatre of London," Globe, March 14, 1891, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> "The Question of Ghosts," P.M.G., March 14, 1891, p. 1.

B.D.A.: What's the plot?

O.C.: The plot? Oh, the plot is -- (hesitates, and tries to recall something which a young dramatic author can be induced to accept as plot).

B.D.A.: Go on. The plot?

O.C.: Well, the plot is that an unpleasant young man thinks he's a sort of congenital idiot, and find out that he is.

B.D.A.: What does he do?

O.C.: He becomes an idiot.

B.D.A.: But after that?

O.C.: Nothing.

B.D.A.: But before that?

O.C.: Nothing.<sup>1</sup>

The basic incongruence between Scott's reviews and those of other daily critics discredits the notion that Scott in any way 'led' critical response to Ghosts.

Since Ghosts was performed on a Friday, weekly papers (which usually came out on Saturdays) were unable to comment upon it until the following weekend, but the Sunday papers all included reviews of the Independents' first venture. The News of the World, in a rare comment on Ibsen, pronounced that "After this, Shelley's Cenci -- hitherto thought difficult to beat in repulsive suggestiveness -- must take a back seat....No second representation of Ghosts should be permitted under any circumstance in a licensed theatre."<sup>2</sup> The Observer had no new ideas to fuel the controversy, and the Referee registered the usual complaints, finding Ibsen's method so crude that there could be no excuse for him. The Sunday Times critic was, as before, considerate of

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<sup>1</sup>"Ghosts. The Ingenious Grein and the Dramatist of Hereditary Disease," Evening News and Post, March 14, 1891, p. 1; rpt. in Hawk, March 17, 1891, p. 292; and Egan, 1972, pp. 196-9.

<sup>2</sup>"Drama and Music," News of the World, special edition, March 15, 1891, p. 6.

Ibsen's technique, but although he had kind things to say about Ghosts, his remarks were countered by provisos concerning the play's over-all effect.

Tragedy, of course, it is, but what an odious theme. Not all the dramatist's skill in the evolution of character, not all the playwright's art in the subjection of episode to the dominating idea of this horrid story, can reconcile us to the revolting hideousness of the subject....We may admire certain literary passages, we may recognise the excellence of certain phases of character, and certain psychological developments, we may be even moved to human sympathy now and then, but oh! the dramatic dismalness, the monstrous moral ugliness, of the whole thing!<sup>1</sup>

Salaman thought that Ghosts would turn the public against the literary reformation desired by the I.T.S., and overshadow the positive effect that Rosmersholm had had on sympathetic recognition of Ibsen.

On the Tuesday after Ghosts, the Hawk published the following lines, which contradicts statements made in Scott's Daily Telegraph editorial:

I am really rather disappointed at having to fall in with the crowd over Ibsen's Ghosts, though my objections to it as a play are scarcely confined to mere abuse, because it deals with an exceedingly disagreeable subject. I should not mind in the least if England boasted a drama and a theatre to which one could not take one's daughters, for I really do not know that the modern dramas would be any worse than the plays of the Elizabethan and Restoration periods, because we could not advisedly leave them in the nursery. I do not suppose that Greek statues, or even some of the figures in Michael Angelo's Last Judgment, would be quite the best things for young girls to sketch from; and I doubt if they would not ask questions if they were set to copy the 'Leda' in the Louvre. And yet few of us would be without these gems.

No; my objection to Ibsen's Ghosts is purely based upon its being bad art from no matter what point of view you look at it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Plays and Players. Independent Ghosts," Sunday Times, March 15, 1891, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Hawk, op cit., p. 291.

'Hawkshaw' confessed to an inability to find anything new or true in Ghosts' construction and characters, and he thought the consideration of hereditary disease "perfectly amateurish."

It has neither the merit of fine writing, the ephemeral interest of a good ghost or murder story, nor the direct truth of a chapter of forensic medicine. It has merely the suggestiveness of a virtuous pamphlet by Mr. W.T. Stead, or the lewdness of an article against girl flogging in Truth or Town Talk.<sup>1</sup>

Two days later, Truth's notice provided some of the choicest epithets of the Ghosts fortnight. In the review, Clement Scott expressed regret that so many writers were advertising the work of Ibsenites and the I.T.S. and creating interest in a clique that the public at large knew nothing about. Ibsen is dirty and dull, wrote Scott, and if people want him, let them have him, but remember,

The decent householder puts his garbage and his offal outside the door, to be taken away by the scavenger in the morning. But some well-bred and educated dog is sure to rout over the pile, and to bury his nose in the nastiest morsel. The better-bred and educated the dog, the more he relishes the worst scrap of carrion. This is human nature. But cannot we leave this muck-heap to the educated and muck-ferreting dogs? If we hunt the hounds away, they will always turn to the delightful pile again.<sup>2</sup>

Scott repeatedly asserted that it would do no good whatsoever to chase Ibsenites from the objects of their adoration, for they concealed their taste for nastiness with a professed love of literature, and niceties cannot be legislated by Act of Parliament. Also on March 19, the Stage became the first trade journal to comment on Ghosts. Its critic found

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 292, rpt. in Egan, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup>[C. Scott], "The Ibsen Folly," Truth, March 19, 1891, p. 601.

the play impossible for English audiences, with a weak structure and cheap, witless dialogue, though some characterizations and performances were admired.

Among the weekly papers issued on March 21, the Academy made the unusual comment that under certain circumstances it might be desirable to read Ghosts, but on stage it was intolerable. The Athenaeum's critic, Joseph Knight, digressed from his Ibsenism to accuse both the play and the production of amateurishness, though he pronounced the lesson of the play puritanical and fiercely moral. Black and White published reviews by McCarthy and W. St. Leger side by side, providing an unusual opportunity for Ibsenite and anti-Ibsen opinion to be easily compared. St. Leger accused Ibsen of lacking naturalism, and exhibiting "a corrupt childishness" in the sense of a child's "unbalanced, unchastened one-sided character." There is nothing new or dramatic in Ibsen, according to St. Leger, and "anybody with an hereditary tendency to verbosity and a taste for 'clinicism' could turn out such work by the yard, but nobody thought of doing so till Ibsen came into the field, and, probably to his great surprise, found himself famous."<sup>1</sup> The Era did not believe that Ghosts would be dangerous to public morals, for unlike pieces that lured audiences with filth and comedy simultaneously, "Ghosts in its inherent dulness supplies an antidote to its own poison." The Gentlewoman was alone in admitting gratitude toward the I.T.S. for having given "a fair and honest chance for thinking about Ibsen" under favourable performance conditions.

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<sup>1</sup>W. St. Leger, "Ibsen's Ghosts: -- From Two Points of View," Black and White, March 21, 1891, p. 222.



'Momus' welcomed the schism in art initiated by the I.T.S., and did not necessarily believe that the Society would perish, despite beginning with "the tonic of a good, sound, all-round, wholesome curse," for so began the aesthetic movement, and its influence was pervasive: "Just look at your wall-paper, think back a few years, and you will see what I mean."<sup>1</sup>

By the time Scott came to write his review for the weekly I.L.N., most of his censorious impulse had deserted him. The I.L.N. review is less harsh than Scott's earlier critiques, but an undertone of frustration about the aftermath of Ghosts is evident. In the I.L.N., hardly a word is devoted to consideration of Ghosts as a play. The first paragraph describes the "cheek" of the I.T.S. in producing an unlicensed play then lecturing its audience on the merits of Ibsen and the necessity of invigorating the English theatre. The second paragraph chastises the Lord Chamberlain's department for not yet taking action on the infringement of the law by the subscription system, thus providing a precedent for the abolition of censorship. The rest of the review is an invective against the absurdity of rebelling against stage conventions with such plays, devoid of art and literature, while denying the efforts of the stage reformers of the last twenty five years (i.e. Irving, Robertson, the Bancrofts, Hare, Gilbert, Pinero, and Jones). Scott argued that it was ridiculous to take English drama by the hand and lead it to someone like Ibsen, a man who looked only at the worst side of human nature and who presented that as the only side in existence. If people desired this sort of

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<sup>1</sup>'Momus,' "Concerning Ghosts," Gentlewoman, March 21, 1891, p. 399.

drama they would undoubtedly have it, "but in our hurry to dramatise the Contagious Diseases Act let us first set about writing a good play," and remember that Ibsen would not appeal to the majority, who regard him as an enemy of society. Instead of lashing out against the indecency of Ibsen, Scott concentrated on proving the superfluity of the I.T.S. and Ibsenites, while bolstering faith in native drama and the usual stage heroes: Irving, Pinero, Jones, et al. The accusations in the Daily Telegraph and Truth that portrayed Ghosts as utterly objection<sup>abk</sup> and worthless are missing from the I.L.N.; "The Playhouses" column is instead devoted to setting forth a treatise against the producers of the free theatre, and their questionable motives.<sup>1</sup>

Among the non-Ibsenite monthly reviews, the Playgoers' Review contained an unfavourable notice by Austin Fryers, and an attempt by William Alison to compare the various accusations and their refutations that appeared in the press the previous weeks. The Theatre contained two negative reviews ("Our Play-box" and "Our Omnibus-box") which fulfill their stated requirement that insofar as Ghosts is concerned,

...all conscientious critics...[must] declare at once, and as publicly as possible, the foulness of the thing, and to proclaim in unequivocal and unmistakeable terms its absolute unfitness for representation in a mixed company of decent people. That duty appears clear enough, but the astounding thing is that any such duty should have become even remotely necessary.<sup>2</sup>

Such "fierce indignation" was believed by McCarthy and other Ibsenites to indicate proof of the importance of Ibsen and the Ibsenite movement, for "were he the mere unclean nonentity that they would fain have us

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<sup>1</sup>C. Scott, "The Playhouses," I.L.N., March 21, 1891, p. 390.

<sup>2</sup>"Our Omnibus-box," Theatre, April 1891, p 219.

believe that they believe him to be, it would not be worth their while...to make such a fuss about him."<sup>1</sup> This allegation was taken up in the I.S.D.N., where the commentator explained that the "Obscenites" attracted a great deal more attention than they deserved because "they shriek so loudly one cannot help telling them to be quiet."<sup>2</sup>

Antagonism over Ghosts hardly waned during the remainder of 1891, and one annual that usually recorded the cast, production details, and plot of each new play had only this brief comment to offer on Ghosts: "The plot of this piece is made up of incidents of a nature too revolting to admit of detailed description."<sup>3</sup>

-- Hedda Gabler

Considering the pitch at which the Ghosts controversy continued until mid-April and the poor reception that the printed text of Hedda Gabler was granted by the non-Ibsenite press, critical response to Robins' production was remarkably unbiased and refreshingly serene. Whereas Ghosts inspired indignation, Hedda Gabler was found to be merely "one of the poorest plays it has ever been our lot to read. The dialogue is trivial, dull, and clumsily expressed....Were it not for the author's name, the piece does not seem to us to deserve such close

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<sup>1</sup>J.H. McCarthy, "Books and Plays," New Review, April 1891, p. 383.

<sup>2</sup>"Circular Notes," I.S.D.N., April 11, 1891, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup>Charles S. Cheltnam (ed.), Dramatic Year Book and Stage Directory for the U.K. (London: Trischler and Company, 1892), p. 162. s.a. Cecil Howard (ed.), Dramatic Notes. An Illustrated Year-book of the Stage, 1892, p. 52 (rpt. of "Our Play-box," Theatre); and "The Dramatic Year," Players, December 30, 1891, p. 53.

comment as even what we have given it."<sup>1</sup> With a few judicious cuts, Hedda was freed of objections relating to moral impropriety;<sup>2</sup> the performance was indisputably legal, and the result was a truly popular and critical success.

A claim by 'Carados' in the Referee that "the high-priced reviews have been speaking out pretty boldly in denunciation of Ibsen and all his works, and Archer, Aveling, and Co. have had to rely for comfort upon their own convictions and the squeaking of a halfpenny trumpet" is not upheld by the findings of this study.<sup>3</sup> For ninepence, a gruff commentary could be found in the Graphic, but in sixpenny and threepenny reviews only two critics were found to dislike Hedda Gabler. One third of all the reviews collected are wholly Ibsenite in tone, and many more are only faintly anti-Ibsen. Four journals specially assigned pro-Ibsen critics to write for them, and two magazines printed both viewpoints. A convert was finally won in Salaman of the Sunday Times, who had vacillated over the balance of merits and demerits of A Doll's House, Rosmersholm, and Ghosts.

Some critics identified in Hedda Gabler the germ of a great drama, but with a script containing only a string of duologues (i.e. not a play at all), and inadequately motivated and uninteresting characters, its greatness was thwarted. Some critics believed that the production's only merit was the acting: the play itself was steeped in pessimism and repulsive medical allusions. Other non-Ibsenites did

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<sup>1</sup>Westminster Review, March 1891, pp. 347-8.

<sup>2</sup>Robins deleted references to Hedda's pregnancy in Act I. See the letter from Shaw to William Archer, April 23, 1891 (Laurence, 1965, p. 295).

<sup>3</sup>'Carados,' "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, May 3, 1891, p. 3.

praise the construction, tight dialogue, tragic intensity, ingenious and true-to-life character studies, and various strong and artistic passages. J.F. Nisbet, for example, was grateful that Ibsen had finally dispensed with his usual trademarks of hereditary taints and incomprehensible characters, and found the play "in some respects the most acceptable of its author's productions," particularly in the way he handled the exposition of Hedda's character:

He allows the case to explain itself, and to do him justice it does this so effectually that in a short time we are content to resign ourselves to what is really a demonstration of the pathology of mind, such as may be found in the pages of the Journal of Mental Science or in the reports of the medical superintendents of lunatic asylums....That the play should be more acceptable than some of its predecessors is a necessary consequence of the very plainness of its thesis, which precludes all discussion of its heroine's actions upon ethical grounds. There is no reasoning as to a lunatic's behaviour....Whether such a type is a good one for the stage is a question that may be left to the judgment of the public. It is something to be thankful for in the case of an Ibsen play to find oneself absolved from the necessity of explaining motives.<sup>1</sup>

Many compliments relate to the excellent production values, though in some cases critics thought that the play was unworthy of the care lavished upon it, especially by the actors.<sup>2</sup> Many critics commented on the scope that the play offered intelligent performers, and Ibsen was once again touted as an 'actress-maker.' The entire cast received praise from non-Ibsenites (the only actor to be singled out for adverse criticism was Arthur Elwood, whose portrayal of Lovborg was judged too

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<sup>1</sup>"Vaudeville Theatre," Times, April 21, 1891, p. 10. Partially rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 218-9.

<sup>2</sup>See "The Stage. Stage Notes," Academy, April 18, 1891, p. 377; and "Goldsmith and Ibsen...", People, April 26, 1891, p. 6, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 233.

gloomy by Austin Fryers and the critic of the Stage).<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Robins and Marion Lea were anxiously sought for interviews and their career prospects were said to be considerably improved by their performances as Hedda and Thea.<sup>2</sup> Although the actors were admired, however, the characters they played were despised.

Robins' performance captivated, mystified, and disturbed non-Ibsenite critics. Hedda was undoubtedly fascinating, but what (wondered the critics) was the source of this fascination, and was it suitable for stage presentation? Hedda seemed to be a painful, ugly example of a monstrous being who appealed to the critics as an example of depraved humanity -- a rare type of *humanity* but a recognizable type. She did not attract admiration, but neither did she inspire revulsion in the way that Mrs. Alving's encouragement of Oswald's incestuous objectives did. Somehow, being a detestable moral leper was less reprehensible than enforcing such a state in other people, and Hedda was simply irresistible. Clement Scott was unaccustomed to

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<sup>1</sup>See "Ibsenility," Era, May 2, 1891, p. 8; and letter number one by Austin Fryers to William Alison: "An Epistolary Critique of Hedda Gabler," Playgoers' Review, May 15, 1891, p. 156. The Stage admired Elwood's make-up and acting, but blamed his inappropriate Byronic gloominess on Ibsen, for the author failed to make this one character wholly comprehensible ("The Vaudeville," April 23, 1891, p. 12).

<sup>2</sup>See 'M.A.B.," Hedda Gabler. An Interview with Miss Elizabeth Robins and Miss Marion Lea," I.L.N., May 30, 1891, p. 720; "The Latest Ibsen Experiment...", P.M.G., April 2, 1891, p. 1; and 'Carados,' "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, June 7, 1891, p. 2. Robins received offers from the Gattis, Thorne, Hare, and Wyndham (Robins, 1932, p. 27). She accepted the Gattis' offer, and played in The Trumpet Call (by G.R. Sims and Robert Buchanan) at the Adelphi until The American (by Henry James) opened at the Opera Comique on September 26. She played occasionally in melodramas after that, but preferred the New Drama and unhesitatingly cancelled her contracts in long-run shows when more adventurous opportunities came up. She retired from the stage in 1894, only to appear in two Ibsen plays and Mariana (by Jose Echegaray) in 1896-7.

seeing such complex villains on the stage, but as a veteran court reporter, he recognized a real woman in Hedda and acknowledged her rare charm:

The character grew under the influence of the actress. Her face was a study. No one could move their eyes from her. It was the morbid attraction that we have felt at the Central Criminal Court at a great murder trial....What a sublime study of deceit and heartlessness! It is said there are such women in the world. There may be, but thank God they are the rare exception, not the rule! And Miss Elizabeth Robins....has made vice attractive by her art. She has almost ennobled crime. She has stopped the shudder that so repulsive a creature should have inspired. She has glorified an unwomanly woman. She has made a heroine out of a sublimated sinner. She has fascinated us with a savage.<sup>1</sup>

This double-edged compliment was probably intentional. Scott believed that Ibsen's skill was so perfect "that for the moment we believe that Hedda Gabler is a noble heroine and not a fiend": the depiction was corrupt but it was also masterful.

Interest some people call it, we prefer to term it morbid attraction. There were the dead bodies, and no one could resist looking at them. Art was used for its most baleful purpose. It is true that the very spectacle of moral corruption was positively fascinating. 'A ghastly picture, beautifully painted' -- this should be the verdict on 'Hedda Gabler.' It did not make you shudder. It enthralled you. So good was the acting, so devoted were the artists with their work that the mind was almost convinced against itself.<sup>2</sup>

Although the selfishness, atheism, and suicide in the drama were so dangerously obscured that unwary spectators might not perceive them properly, Scott seemed to believe that the exquisite interpretation given in the production justified the portrayal of qualities that, under any other circumstances, he would have condemned. A few other anti-Ibsen critics did not believe that Robins' consummate art -- which

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<sup>1</sup>"The Playhouses," Daily Telegraph, April 25, 1891, p. 550.

<sup>2</sup>"Vaudeville Theatre," Daily Telegraph, April 21, 1891, p. 3.

caused the audience to overlook Hedda's intense perversity -- justified her existence on stage. Hedda's absence of redemptive features caused the Morning Advertiser's critic to dismiss her as an impossible specimen of humanity. In an effort to describe the magnitude of the impropriety in the character, Austin Fryers compared Hedda to a monkey-man portrayed in the melodrama, For Ever; neither character was suited to public entertainment, but Hedda was the least acceptable of the two, for she debased every human characteristic and "the only shadow of excuse which can be urged for her existence is what Ibsen may have intended, but which his English disciples will never admit --that she is insane."<sup>1</sup>

The possibility that Ibsen might really gain a hold on the English stage began to be admitted by non-Ibsenites during Hedda Gabler's successful run. Ibsen seemed less of a passing fad, and the possibility that he was in London on a permanent or at least a semi-permanent basis (symbolized by his rumoured visit in May) had to be conceded. The Queen denied that playgoers wanted Ibsen to be emulated by English dramatists, though on the same day the Era printed a report that Henry Arthur Jones viewed the evening run of Hedda Gabler as "one of the most significant signs of the times in England." While regretting Ibsen's single-minded absorption with the undesirable aspects of human nature, Jones admitted Ibsen's importance for the English stage and his active role in breaking down theatrical conventions.

I think Ibsen's influence has been of great value to the English stage as an emetic or liver pill. For some time past a whole army of theatricalities and conventionalities has been tottering about on the British stage only waiting for

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<sup>1</sup>Austin Fryers, Letter to editor, Era, May 2, 1891, p. 8.



'killing truth to glare upon them.' It is in the sincerity of his methods that Ibsen is of great value to the English stage just now. Our stock dummies, our regiments of falsely accused heroes, our masterpieces of impossible virtue and impossible vice, our whole apparatus of ingenious, Chinese puzzle situation, our whole puppet show has been convicted of falsehood and unreality. All the sawdust is running out of our favourite dolls, and in respect of much of our modern English drama the public are rapidly adopting one of the catch phrases in Hedda Gabler, and are saying, 'Good God! People don't do such things!'<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning, Ibsenism had been likened to aestheticism and Wagnerism, and since the earlier reforms had been adopted, it was feared that Ibsenism too might meet with success. M. Thomas and other advocates of the status quo believed that satire could crush the new theatrical craze as successfully as it had suppressed Oscar Wilde and the cult of the sunflower:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in "Theatrical Gossip," Era, May 2, 1891, p. 10, and rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 233-4.

<sup>2</sup>In the light of the following evidence, Thomas' optimistic remarks are erroneous: George du Maurier was a cartoonist for Punch. "[In] 1879...du Maurier introduced his famous artistic family, the Cimabue Browns and their aesthetic young friends, Postlethwaite and Maudle. The Browns, mother, father, and children, aspired to live an artistic life in which they were guided by their admiration for the poet, Postlethwaite, and the painter, Maudle, who in their turn admired each other and their respective arts. In appearance the artistic pair were based roughly on Wilde and Whistler with a touch of Swinburne. They drooped and were lionized in drawing-rooms filled with spindly black furniture, Japanese fans and screens covered in bulrushes and sunflowers. In due course du Maurier became so absorbed in his creations that their own supposed work began to appear in Punch....Maudle's comments on current affairs appeared in articles in Punch in 1880 and 1881 and many readers must have believed that he actually existed." F.C. Burnand was the editor of Punch at this time, and led the campaign to ridicule aestheticism and aesthetes. He wrote a play, The Colonel, which attempted to burlesque the movement but which succeeded principally as an excellent advertisement for aestheticism, as the Philistines who came to see the play laughed at the philosophy that they were very unconsciously absorbing. "The play had a long and successful run in London and in the autumn of 1881 gained the distinction of a Royal Command performance before Queen Victoria at Abergeldie Castle in Scotland. The new ideas were so generally accepted by this time that furniture for the aesthetic scene was purchased expressly in Edinburgh to save the cost of transport from

For ourselves, we have no hesitation in saying that it will be of evil omen for our stage and dramatic literature if these crude and depressing productions should ever attain to the temporary vogue enjoyed by the affectations of Maudie and Postlethwaite before Messrs. Du Maurier, Burnand, and Gilbert took them in hand.<sup>3</sup>

But the vogue seemed to come into difficulties even without burlesques when the uncontroversial Lady from the Sea received an abominable staging in mid-May. Even the Ibsenites' notices of this production are lukewarm, and critics nostalgically recalled the recent days of battle when the enemy was an enemy, and not a wrung-out also-ran.

-- The Lady from the Sea

Most commentators believed that The Lady from the Sea was doomed to failure: with such a slow moving plot, ridiculous and wearisome dialogue, unsympathetic characters, pessimistic outlook, and leading lady, how could it succeed? What little poetry the play was admitted to possess was unrealized in the production. Rose Mellor lacked sufficient talent to interpret Ellida. She was aware that the Ibsenites preferred Ellen Terry for the part, and so donned a clinging green gown and imitated Terry's hairstyle and mannerisms, but her performance was as inadequate as her supporting players'.

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London and additional pieces were borrowed from the Prince and Princess of Wales." A musical burlesque, Patience, or Bunthorne's Bride, by W.S. Gilbert heralded the high point in fun over aestheticism, both in London and New York. "Subtitled 'An Aesthetic Opera', it was an immediate success, acknowledged by all but the Punch critic who ignored its very existence, presumably because he regarded the opera as unfair competition for The Colonel." Quotations from Elizabeth Aslin, The Aesthetic Movement. Prelude to Art Nouveau (London: Elek, 1969), pp. 112, 116, 125.

<sup>3</sup>"Hedda Gabler at the Vaudeville," Daily News, April 21, 1891, p. 6.

Three critics placed the blame exclusively on the actors, and not on the play, which they had found interesting to read but which was not as impressive on stage.

Even those who do not worship Ibsen are compelled to admit that as a reading play 'The Lady from the Sea' is poetic, imaginative, and interesting. It is, in a degree, hypnotic, for an unseen and far distant human being exercises an extraordinary influence....And yet this play, that promised more perhaps than any other if it were put upon the stage, proved in representation the most disappointing of any of Ibsen's yet seen in England.<sup>1</sup>

Both Clement Scott and the critic of the Gentlewoman concurred with this assessment: "It would be distinctly unfair to blame Ibsen for the dull, lifeless, and on the whole, unenlightened performance," for "The acting wrecked the romance."<sup>2</sup>

The Lady from the Sea was the fifth Ibsen production of the season. The St. James's Gazette attributed its failure to the palling effect of repeated productions of Ibsen's plays, for in this play was found "merely another variant of the tale to which Ibsen has already accustomed us, related, however, with far less skill and power than he has displayed elsewhere."<sup>3</sup> Criticism of The Lady from the Sea has a very tired tone, as if the writers (thoroughly fatigued by Ibsen) were disappointed that the latest production lacked elements shocking and controversial enough to rouse them into the proper mood for denouncing Ibsen.

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<sup>1</sup>"Our Playbox. The Lady from the Sea," Theatre, July 1, 1891, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup>[C. Scott], "Terry's Theatre," Daily Telegraph, May 12, 1891, p. 3; and Gentlewoman, May 16, 1891, p. 674, rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 248-9.

<sup>3</sup>"Ibsen Again. The Lady from the Sea," St. James's Gazette, May 12, 1891, p. 6.

-- A Doll's House (June)

Reviews of Rose Norreys' production of A Doll's House are even more low-keyed than those of The Lady from the Sea, as critics had little cause to offer comments on a twice-revived play, and were restricted to remarking on the performances of the principal actors. No consensus about Norreys' success in the role or her suitability to it was reached, and no pattern of commitment to anti-Ibsenism is discernible in the comments. Interest in the production is typified by the Gentlewoman's description and illustration of Norreys' gowns,<sup>1</sup> a distinction not granted to earlier Ibsen productions. The Times was short and to the point: "There was nothing in the performance to correct the pretty general feeling that for the present we have had enough of Ibsen's heroines,"<sup>2</sup> and in the same vein, Punch published the following verse in lieu of a review:

To Rose Norreys as 'Nora'

Dear Rose, in your way, you're as brimful of Art  
As a picture by Reynolds, a statue by Gibson;  
And we'll never cut you, though we don't like your part,  
Pretty Rose, in A Doll's House, as written by IBSEN.  
Yet we crowd on your track, as the hounds on the quarry's,  
And, though carping at Nora, delight in our Norreys.<sup>3</sup>

The production enabled Norreys, a popular comedienne, to attempt a serious role, but her technique was not easily adapted to the New Drama. She was inclined to over-play in the first act, and her callisthenic behaviour and grimacing were distracting, annoying, and not

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<sup>1</sup>See the Gentlewoman, June 6, 1891, pp. 772 and 773.

<sup>2</sup>Times, June 4, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Punch, June 13, 1891, p. 277.

at all to the point. The tarantella was admired, but it was also suggested that Norreys peaked before this sequence and realized the error of her forgery too soon. According to the I.S.D.N., Norreys' failure in the last act was the fault of Ibsen, not the actress, but other reviewers admired her third act performance and saw more fidelity to Ibsen's intentions than in Achurch's interpretation.

### Anti-Ibsen Projects, Especially Parodies and Burlesques

An indication of the public knowledge about Ibsen and a major part of anti-Ibsen response to the work of Ibsenites can be found in published and staged burlesques of Ibsen, his work, and his admirers. Following the 1889 performance of A Doll's House, Walter Besant published a sequel to the play, and in early 1890 Bernard Shaw published a sequel to Besant's sequel. In March 1891, Eleanor Marx Aveling and Israel Zangwill made a final attempt to repair the impression left at the end of the original play by 'correcting' and 'completing' Ibsen's work.<sup>1</sup> By the time this piece appeared, however, non-Ibsenites were parodying and burlesquing the style of Ibsen's writing, and not merely amending his dénouements. The relatively large output of such pieces in the spring of 1891 may indicate a desire on the part of the non-Ibsenites to cushion themselves from the deluge of Ibsenite projects and to express the frustration they felt when their efforts to ignore, curse, and deride Ibsen failed to prevent new productions or to silence the Ibsenites. Perhaps they resorted to

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<sup>1</sup>"A Doll's House Repaired," Time, March 1891.

parody in order to make light of what they insisted could not be taken seriously, and as part of their proof that it could not be taken seriously. They mimicked the techniques of Ibsen, pointing out absurdities just barely submerged beneath a veil of what they perceived to be dull and prosaic dialogue. Some of the results are witty, lively and apt -- others are less successful.

The satirists were attracted to the major Ibsenite projects of the season, yet though Ghosts was frequently alluded to, it was Rosmersholm, Hedda Gabler, A Doll's House, and The Wild Duck (rumoured to be an I.T.S. production) that received direct treatment. Most of the parodies were offered in good sport, and Ibsenites enjoyed the satirists' efforts to find humour in the midst of backbiting and debate. The Ibsenites themselves were a source of fun, and both the serious and frivolous non-Ibsenites loved to portray them as bizarrely clad extremists with ludicrous ideas about reforming drama and society, rather like the aesthetes of a few years before. Most of the parodies that appeared in the reviews and comic journals take after specific plays. The staged burlesques that non-Ibsenites clamoured after, and finally received late in the season, are conglomerates of various plays.

Ibsen's disregard for stage conventions, the improbabilities in his plots, the awkward and seemingly absurd dialogue, peculiar comic relief, and fizzled tag lines were parodied by J.P. Hurst in Black and White, following the premiere of Rosmersholm. Ulric Brendel's entrance in Act I is choice, not only for its satire of Ibsen but for the parodist's perception of the advanced drama in general:

RECTOR K. [To Rosmer] Have you had any journalistic experience?

ROSMER. Not the slightest.

RECTOR K. Then you are the very man we require as Editor of our new daily, the 'Skogshorn Eye Opener,' with which we mean to smash up that rag 'The Beacon.'

ROSMER. Very sorry, old man, but the fact is -- (To Ulric Brendel, who enters). Hulloah, what do you want?

BRENDEL. Sorry to intrude; I know I have absolutely no connection with the plot. But then, you see, I am thrown in as a bit of character.

RECTOR K. (With a snort.) A precious fine character -- you!

BRENDEL. But indeed I am, though I don't quite know what. I fancy I'm meant for a sort of bitter, soured Bohemian -- something in the style of Augier's Giboyer -- only he was witty and human -- while I -- I am dull and impossible.

BECKY WEST. Don't let that put you out -- you're not much worse off than the rest of us in that respect. As for your Augier, he belonged to a time when the drama was not held to be, unlike any other art, above all guiding laws.

BRENDEL. It's very kind of you thus to comfort me, 'seductive lady.'

BECKY WEST. (With dignity). Sir!

BRENDEL. Don't be offended -- it's not my fault if I am vulgar. (Confidentially). You see, as far as poor Madam Helseth and I can make out, we have got to be the 'comic relief' in this piece. And now, having interrupted the story for no conceivable purpose, I will take myself off. (Exit).<sup>1</sup>

Another burlesque of Rosmersholm was anticipated in late March.

This piece, which turned out to be a full-length play, was not a burlesque at all but a serious documentation of all the events antecedent to Rosmersholm itself. Austin Fryers was the author, though this was not generally known at the time, as Rosmer of Rosmersholm was published anonymously.<sup>2</sup> Fryers was closely associated with the Playgoers' Club, and hitherto he was assumed to have been an Ibsenite,

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<sup>1</sup>J.P. Hurst, "Rosmer's Home, Sweet Home! A Very Original Drama in Four Acts. By Henry Ibb, Sen.," Black and White, March 14, 1891, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup>[Austin Fryers, pseud. W.L. Clery], Rosmer of Rosmersholm (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1891). Rpt. on microcard in the Nineteenth Century British and American Plays series. Though the identity of the author was unknown, Fryers was known to be working on an Ibsen parody of some sort (see 'Momus,' "Play-things," Gentlewoman, March 28, 1891, p. 430).

but his reviews, letters, and preface to the play make it clear that though he appreciated certain aspects of Ibsen, he thought 'the Master' was incapable of structuring a play and presenting it in a coherent order.<sup>1</sup> In March and April, 1891, it was assumed that Rosmer of Rosmersholm was written by an anti-Ibsen partisan, as no true Ibsenite would dream of offering his own work as superior to the great Norwegian's, or would presume to tamper with the ideal form of the original. The Playgoer's Review speculated on the plot of the forthcoming Rosmer of Rosmersholm; these sketches, supposedly submitted by the "office boy" are by the conspicuous mainstream playwrights Henry Arthur Jones and George Sims, and the anti-Ibsen critic Clement Scott.<sup>2</sup> After the play's publication, however, and especially once it was produced as Beata in 1892,<sup>3</sup> the author, whose identity was by that time known, was mistakenly thought to be an Ibsenite.

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<sup>1</sup>For a concise summary of Fryers' opinions of Ibsen, see his letter in the Era, February 28, 1891, p. 15. His involvement in Ibsenism was somewhat contradictory throughout the early 90s. In 1917, he claimed to have an Ibsen manuscript of a posthumous sequel to Ghosts. This play, entitled "Realities" was published by Fawcett and Co., but the hoax was later exposed by a letter from William Heinemann to the Times, on September 24, 1917. s.a. Paulus, 1959, pp. 182-4.

<sup>2</sup>"Playgoers' Notes," Playgoers' Review, April 15, 1891, pp. 136-9.

<sup>3</sup>Matinees commenced at the Globe Theatre on April 19, but from April 24 until May 11, evening performances were given. A few changes were made in the script, including compression of the action from four acts to only three. Most importantly, however, the ending was changed so as to render Rosmersholm superfluous: Rebecca declares her love for Rosmer, but he is so deeply offended by this insult to his hospitality and to his wife that when Beata's suicide is announced Rosmer declares that he, too, must end his life. He welcomes Rebecca's love only if she will share Beata's fate with him; Rebecca refuses, and as Rosmer approaches the mill race she declares "BEATA HAS HIM STILL!" (Lord Chamberlain's Plays, BL Add. MS 53496, lic. 84.) c.f. Chapter Seven.



In a humorous vein, 'F. Anstey's' (Thomas Anstey Guthrie, a novelist) series of Ibsen parodies began with Rosmersholm in the March 21 issue of Punch, and weekly instalments by "Mr. P.'s Own Harmless Ibsenite" continued until May 30. Punch's series of lampoons on Rosmersholm, A Doll's House, Hedda Gabler, and The Wild Duck were very popular in 1891, and with the addition of newer plays were reprinted in 1893 and 1895.<sup>1</sup>

Whether Anstey was burlesquing Ibsen's minor characters and alleged improprieties (as when Rank gloomily intones that "A poor fellow with both feet in the grave is not the best authority on the fit of silk stockings"), or ridiculing the absurdity of Ibsen's 'advanced' notions, his playlets are delightful. Of course, his Nora returns almost immediately to the pretty bird cage.

(The dull sound of an unskilled latchkey is heard trying the lock; presently the door opens, and Nora, with a somewhat foolish expression, reappears.)

Helmer. What? Back already! Then you are educated?

Nora. (puts down dressing-bag). No, Torvald, not yet. Only, you see, I found I had only threepence-halfpenny in my purse, and the Norwegian theatres are all closed at this hour -- and so I thought I wouldn't leave the cage till to-morrow -- after breakfast.

Helmer. (as if to himself). The greatest miracle of all has happened. My little bird is not in the bush just yet!

(Nora takes down a showily bound dictionary from the shelf and begins her education; Helmer fetches a bag of macaroons, sits near her, and tenders one humbly. A pause. Nora repulses it, proudly. He offers it again. She snatches at it suddenly, still without looking at him, and nibbles it thoughtfully as Curtain falls.)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mr. Punch's Pocket Ibsen, illus. Bernard Partridge (London: Heinemann, 1893); and The Pocket Ibsen. A Collection of Some of the Master's Best-Known Dramas (London: Heinemann, 1895). Anstey's parodies were also popular in Norway.

<sup>2</sup>"Nora; or, the Bird-Cage (Et Dikkisvoit)," Punch, April 18, 1891, p. 185.

The seemingly inexplicable motives of many characters intrigued Anstey. Hedwig, for example, tells Gregers Werle that she has decided not to shoot the wild duck: "No -- it seemed such a delightful idea at first. Now it strikes me as a trifle -- well, Ibsenish."<sup>1</sup>

Anstey neglected to parody Ghosts, but the day after the I.T.S. production, the Evening News and Post printed a fictitious dialogue of "club conversation" between its critic and a young playwright. The dialogue satirizes Grein's "gratuitous hints on criticism" offered in his curtain speech, with facetious gratitude for the two-tone programme given to critics along with the "ready-made criticism of the piece [supplied] as a basis and guide for their notices." The experience of seeing Ghosts is captured in an ironic poem following the Post's dialogue. The poem's narrator attempts to identify the cause of his disordered waking condition, and considers the locations and activities that could have produced such an effect, eventually recalling that he "drank at the Ibsenite spring...for once in my life had my fling / And supped full of horrors -- and / Ghosts!"<sup>2</sup>

Another poem, "An Independent Criticism (By a Plain Man)," appeared in the St. James's Gazette on March 17. It discounts the claims made for Ibsen and concludes that he must conform to conventional play-writing standards if he is to retain any fame. "How We Found Gibbsen" is a takeoff on the activities of the Independent Theatre Society, the Playgoers' Club (and its revolutionary monthly publication the Carrión

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<sup>1</sup>"The Wild Duck," Punch, May 30, 1891, p. 253.

<sup>2</sup>"Ghosts. The Ingenious Grein and the Dramatist of Hereditary Disease," Evening News and Post, March 14, 1891, p. 1. Rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 196-9, and 200.

Crow), the mission of the Ibsenite leaders, and the gullibility of Ibsen idolators. The story concerns a club that exists to expose the sham of modern society and to defeat conventionalism. Mr. Larnard Baw (Bernard Shaw) discovers the theatre's potential as a great educational medium, and so Bowman (William Archer) introduces the members to the plays of Gibsen, which are thought to be wonderfully well suited to the mission of the club.

'Gibson is an Esquimaux,' explained Dr. Raveling [Aveling], our president, rather severely. 'But our friend Bowman has translated most of his plays, including Noah's Ark, Madda Jabbrer, Rumunsatholm, and the Tame Goose...

'How about the Lord Chamberlain?' murmured Stangwill [Zangwill], soothingly.

'We should never allow the officials of a corrupt Government to interfere with the regeneration of the people', replied Mr. Larnard Baw, with lofty scorn. 'I propose that we start a private theatre of our own, and there produce one of these splendid works. By this means we shall familiarise the people with Gibsen's glorious theories, the effete dramatists of to-day will be pulverised, the Daily Phonograph will cease publication, and its dramatic critic will be driven to the workhouse, while the vile old fetish of respectability will be shattered at our feet'....We shall go down to posterity as the apostles of the glorious creed of Pessimism, of which Gibsen is the great exponent. In the meantime, we shall keep our names well before the public. What better reward could we desire?'<sup>1</sup>

And thus the Indescribable Theatre is founded, and Noah's Ark is chosen as its first production. They have some difficulty getting a leading man, but finally "a neglected tragedian who had been 'resting' for fifteen years, and was prepared to play all Gibsen's characters backward, if required, for the sake of the advertisement,"<sup>2</sup> is located.

On the opening night, it is rumoured that Gibsen himself has come to watch the performance. Increasingly obtrusive chuckling is heard from

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<sup>1</sup>Hawk, March 17, 1891, pp. 294-5. Rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 205-9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, Egan, pp. 207-8.

a private box -- it shakes the foundations of the Indescribable Theatre. After the curtain is rung down, Raveling, Baw, and Bowman rush up to the box, only to discover that Gibsen is rolling on the floor, laughing uproariously, and shouting 'damned fools' in his native language. He explains that his plays were written "to test the depth to which the vanity and gullibility of the modern apostles of social regeneration were capable of sinking."<sup>1</sup> Gibsen doubted the existence of anyone who was sufficiently humorless and unreasonable to take his plays seriously, but the Indescribable Theatre convinces him that he had not laboured in vain.

The idea that Ibsenites were the dupes of a corrupt writer whose proof for his theory of modern man's depravity is found in the actions of his admirers, is frequently repeated in anti-Ibsen commentary, reflecting a barely sublimated wish that insincerity might explain away the whole Ibsen phenomenon.

"Bogies," a skit parodying Ghosts, was rumoured to be forthcoming at a West End theatre in April 1891, but there is no indication that this piece, by Isidore Gordon-Ascher, was ever seen.<sup>2</sup> The first Ibsen parody to be produced was Campbell Rae-Brown's "A Pair of Ghosts --(After Ibsen)," which was supposedly performed by Rose Kennedy (as Flossie Speckleton) at Steinway Hall on April 16, and at an unknown venue on June 18, though no reviews of the performances have been located.<sup>3</sup> Gretchen Paulus describes the piece as a duologue, but the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, Egan, pp. 208-9.

<sup>2</sup>Two references to this piece are known: "Theatrical Gossip," Era, April 11, 1891, p. 10; and "Chit Chat," Stage, April 9, 1891, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>See "Chit Chat," Stage, April 2, 1891, p. 11; and "Plays and Players," Globe, June 4, 1891, p. 6. The London press did not usually acknowledge

name of the second actor and character are unknown.<sup>1</sup> The nature of the piece is also unknown: Campbell Rae-Brown wrote many dramatic skits (including an imaginary interview between Ibsen and Mrs. Grundy)<sup>2</sup> but this particular one is not known to survive.

Other mysterious burlesques are mentioned in the periodicals. The Stage of March 19 reported that a volume entitled "Goats and no Kid, Go-a-Hedda Gabler, and other dramas, by Henry Gibson" was being speedily prepared by Austin Fryers; another reference to this appears in the New York Dramatic Mirror of April 11, where the title is modified to "Goats, Go-a-Hedder Gobler and Other Dream," though no author is given. It is unlikely that these isolated reports are anything but whimsy.<sup>3</sup>

On April 27, the Playgoers' Club devoted its meeting to "Parody and Burlesque." Wilton Jones, a prolific writer of burlesques, read a paper on the genre and concluded with a sample of his work. "One Day in a Woman's Life," a parody on Ibsen's naturalism, "proved to be eminently diverting, and was received with roars of laughter -- by none

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productions outside the West End, and only occasionally reviewed matinees; the theatrical trade magazines, the Era and Stage, sometimes reviewed presentations of this sort, but unfortunately this particular production escaped their attention.

<sup>1</sup>See Paulus, 1959, p. 170, and Franc, 1918, p. 121. This skit is not included in the Lord Chamberlain's plays, in J.P. Wearing's The London Stage, 1890-1899: A Calendar of Plays and Players (Metuchen, M.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1976), or in Allardyce Nicoll's A History of Late Nineteenth Century Drama, 1850-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1949).

<sup>2</sup>Playgoers' Review, April 15, 1891, pp. 112-4.

<sup>3</sup>"Chit Chat," Stage, March 19, 1891, p. 9; and New York Dramatic Mirror, April 11, 1891, p. 8. The Gentlewoman of March 18, 1891, reported that Fryers was preparing a burlesque of Ibsen. Since Rosmer of Rosmersholm was published anonymously about the same time, there may simply have been confusion in the press reports ('Momus,' "Play-things," p. 430).

more uproariously than by the Ibsenites present."<sup>1</sup> The skit, which was later printed in the Club's magazine, begins with a ten minute conversation between Christine and the milkman on the topic of the symptoms of measles. Banal breakfast dialogue follows, with droll interjections of famous lines and other allusions to Ibsen, for example:

Petra. Are you going to let my sister marry Olaf Christensen?  
Borgstadt. H'm! Yes. I had thought -- but there are reasons.  
           She is his half sister, you know.  
Petra. Fancy that! My awful dad!<sup>2</sup>

The piece ends on an interrogative note: the joke in this was that such an Ibsenesque ambiguity ought to inspire reams of commentary in the journalistic press.

The impact Hedda Gabler made when it was performed is clear in Wilton Jones' skit and in other travesties of May and June. An imaginary duologue between Hedda Gabler and Grant Allen parodying the situation suggested by the latter's comment that "Hedda Gabler was just such a lady as he takes in to dinner nineteen times in twenty," appeared in the Speaker of May 16. Hedda Gabler and Grant Allen chat amiably about guns and killing oneself gracefully while Nora Helmer, George Tesman, and Thea Elvsted dine nearby.<sup>3</sup> Another travesty of Hedda Gabler was planned for performance at the Strand Theatre in early June, with Alice Atherton as Hedda and Willie Edouin as Ibsen, but

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<sup>1</sup>"Plays and Players," Globe, April 30, 1891, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Playgoers' Review, May 15, 1891, p. 144. s.a. pp. 143-5.

<sup>3</sup>"Mr. Grant Allen at Dinner," Speaker, May 16, 1891, p. 577-8.

whether there were difficulties at the Strand or whether J.L. Toole's parody (see below) satiated demand, this production did not come about.<sup>1</sup>

Very early in 1891, the Saturday Review appealed to aspiring comedians to fulfill the demand for an Ibsen spoof along the following lines:

Nora and Hedda may swear eternal friendship, and half of the characters discuss their hereditary gout, and everybody 'die beautifully,' taking great pains not to shoot themselves where the chunk of old red sandstone hit. Diversified by ballets, it would be a gay performance, and so, we presume, we shall never see Nora dancing with the pink stockings, and Hedda practising with her celebrated pistols, and all the wrong people drinking too much milk-punch....There is, we venture to think, some fun to be got out of The Ibsenites, who are at least as absurd as the old Sunflower people.<sup>2</sup>

When just such a satire was presented at Toole's Theatre on May 30, the critics proclaimed that an Ibsen burlesque on stage was inevitable: it took a long time to come about, they said (conveniently overlooking previous attempts by Rae-Brown and Gordon-Ascher), but it appeared just in time to ride the ebbing tide of interest in Ibsen's works. Its clever amalgamation of memorable moments from the season's Ibsen productions, and the witty dialogue by J.M. Barrie assured success. Ibsen's Ghost; or, Toole up-to-date portrays the unfortunate but enjoyable compulsion of Thea Tesman (formerly Mrs. Elvsted) to kiss

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<sup>1</sup>The Observer ("At the Play," May 24, 1891, p. 6) reported that since Hedda Gabler was expected to close in about a week's time, it would not last long enough to see itself burlesqued by the Strand production. See announcements in "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, May 17, 1891, p.3; and "Chit Chat," Stage, May 21, 1891, p. 9. Edouin and Atherton played together in three pieces between April and July, but none of them can be construed as an Ibsen burlesque.

<sup>2</sup>"Some Ibsenisms," Saturday Review, February 28, 1891, p. 247, rpt. Egan, 1972, p. 170.

every man she meets -- needless to say, this affliction is hereditary (her grandfather kissed a bridesmaid the night before his wedding). Other parodies amused, but Ibsen's Ghost captured the spirit of the season. Its jokes were best understood by playgoers who had at least seen Hedda Gabler (if not Rosmersholm, A Doll's House and Ghosts as well), for Thea is transformed into Hedda, and throws her husband's letters into the fire (i.e. destroying hundreds of their 'children'). Toole first appears as Thea's grandfather (who is reproached by his wife for failing to introduce her to disreputable people -- thereby thwarting her chance to live an unorthodox life), and later is transformed into Henrik Ibsen. The parody ends with an orgy of pop-gun firing, symbolizing a mass suicide.

This clever work was appreciated by non-Ibsenites as humorous relief from the tedium of the original plays, and by the Ibsenites as "a piece of genuinely witty fooling, which ought not to be missed."<sup>1</sup> It was the prize anti-Ibsen project of the year. Other parodies amused, but, as Scott wrote, Ibsen's Ghost "not only hit the mark but scored a bull's eye".<sup>2</sup> Some non-Ibsenites believed that the pleasure Barrie afforded justified the pain of sitting through the original plays!

Henceforth let no one say that Ibsen has lived in vain. We may condemn his work, pooh-pooh his theories, deride his methods, and dub him [a] 'suburban' dramatist; but the man who affords us, even indirectly, half an hour's continuous merriment has earned a distinct title to our gratitude....In it Ibsen is out-Ibsened, and his doctrines pushed to the verge of absurdity. And yet so nearly does the travesty

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "The Theatres," World, June 3, 1891, p. 872.

<sup>2</sup>"The Playhouses," Illustrated London News, June 6, 1891, p. 760.



trench upon the original, that at times it is difficult not to believe that we are sitting at the feet of the great Norwegian master himself. So clearly felt is that...only those who are well acquainted with Ibsen's writings can hope fully to appreciate the humour of the new 'Hedda,' as it is named.<sup>1</sup>

Ibsen's Ghost played for twenty seven performances, much above the average run of Toole's one-act burlesques that season, which was fifteen performances. The company went on tour that July, cutting short what might have been an even longer run.<sup>2</sup>

Another burlesque was meant to open at the same time as Ibsen's Ghost, but the indisposition of W.H. Vernon postponed the premiere until June 2 -- this was neither the first nor the last of the production's difficulties. Robert Buchanan, the author, who had engaged in a dispute with someone every year since he first attacked Rosetti's and Swinburne's "Fleshy School of Poetry" (1871),<sup>3</sup> was said to have been incited to anger and jealousy by the production of Hedda Gabler at the Vaudeville, the theatre where his plays were customarily performed. Although he publicly denied it, he was accused of taking the

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<sup>1</sup>"Toole's Theatre. More Ibsenism," St. James's Gazette, June 1, 1891, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>The report of the summer tour, which is given by Penelope Griffin in "The First Performance of Ibsen's Ghost...," Theatre Notebook, Vol. 23, no. 1, 1979, contradicts reports in the I.S.D.N. for June 6, 1891, and the Era of July 11 and 18, 1891, p. 8: according to these sources, Toole's gout prevented him from preparing any new plays after Ibsen's Ghost and from properly performing in a play in Norwich during the first week of July -- he subsequently headed for Aix-les-Bains. For more detail about the play, see P.F. Griffin, "Ibsen's Ghost, by J.M. Barrie (an edition with textual apparatus and commentary and critical introduction)," Ph.D. Diss., Birkbeck College, London, 1970, or Sir J.M. Barrie, Ibsen's Ghost..., ed. Penelope Griffin (London: Cecil Woolf, 1975).

<sup>3</sup>See John A. Cassidy, Robert W. Buchanan (New York: Twayne, 1973).

Avenue Theatre to produce a vengeful attack on Ibsen.<sup>1</sup> He had included a scathing attack on Ibsen in his book The Coming Terror (published in April),<sup>2</sup> and many of the things he complains about there are satirized in his play. The title of Buchanan's social drama cum Ibsen parody (he insisted that it did not attack Ibsen or exhibit malice of any sort) was Heredity, but finding that this title was already on record with the Examiner of Plays, the hapless playwright was obliged to rename his work The Gifted Lady.

The play is about two emancipated free-thinkers, Badalia Dangleton (Hedda Gabler) and Felicia Strangeways (Thea Elvsted), who independently form alliances with Algernon Wormwood, a poet of the "modern horrible school." Wormwood is encouraged by a critic named Vitus Dance (V.D.), who believes that the work of this "poet of the Morgue" will lead to a new sort of writing, "circumscribed to its true function -- it will no longer deal with subjects....It will have no more meaning than a chord, no more personality than an influenza." Badalia's husband, Charles (Torvald Helmer/George Tesman), is not in sympathy with her advanced views, so she leaves him to enter into a relationship with Wormwood: after all, "a woman's duty is to herself, and to her dress-maker," and besides, Charles makes his living as a writer of conventional comedies, and "no man who respected himself would write a play which could run more than five nights, or would

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<sup>1</sup>See Buchanan's letter to the editor of the Observer, May 24, 1891, p. 6. He wrote unfavourably about Ibsen all season; see, for example, his review of the Gosse translation of Hedda Gabler, "The French Novelette as Norwegian Drama," Illustrated London News, January 31, 1891, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Buchanan, The Coming Terror. And Other Essays and Letters (London: Heinemann, 1891). See pp. 376-80.

condescend on any terms to be amusing!" In the second act, Wormwood is pursued by the "White Donkeys of Dangleton." After Charles attends a performance of the Independent Theatre Society he is convinced that his own emancipation can only be complete if he murders someone or commits suicide; furthermore, it is rumoured that he would only be satisfied if Wormwood and Badalia drowned themselves in the mill race. To complicate matters, Charles discovers that his great-great grandfather was a polygamist and his uncle married a cook, so Charles offers to trade his own wife for Felicia (who has also abandoned her husband to live with Wormwood), and buys his housemaid a fancy hat and a divided skirt. Between the second and third acts, Wormwood is offered a position at a drapery warehouse in Birmingham, and goes there to marry the draper's daughter and live a philistine existence. In Act III, Felicia returns to her husband. Badalia, too, goes home, longing for the return of normality and her husband's affection, but he has only delved further into his emancipation. He spent a delightful evening eating asparagus at his club and exploring the dissecting room of the University Hospital. In the final moment, he whistles a meaningless tune -- this magically cures him of his mania and reconciles him with his wife. Vitus Dance, the critic of the future, goes to Gatti's to efface himself.<sup>1</sup>

Some non-Ibsenite critics responded to The Gifted Lady with mild enthusiasm, praising the acting and some of the jibes at emancipated women, aestheticism, individualism, heredity, and the divided skirt, while regretting that the play was quite as long as it was. Others,

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<sup>1</sup>From the Lord Chamberlain's Plays, Number 53475, lic. 133.

predisposed to disliking Buchanan's work, lashed out against him with the fury of an anti-Ibsen critic at Ghosts. The play inspired an unprecedented unity of opinion in anti-Ibsen and pro-Ibsen camps. Compared to Ibsen's Ghost, it "constituted a British remedy considerably worse than the Scandinavian disease itself,"<sup>1</sup> and was a major disappointment. Part of the problem was its excessive length:

Mr. J.M. Barrie showed us conclusively just the extent to which Ibsen bears ridicule. He will bear it for half an hour at the utmost, and when that allotted span is exhausted he becomes wearisome. Three acts of Ibsen proper is as exhausting as the depression that succeeds the baleful influenza; but three acts of Ibsen burlesqued is worse than the horrors of catarrh, bronchitis, nervous malaria, and double pneumonia combined. It is unendurable.<sup>2</sup>

The sum effect of The Gifted Lady was, according to the Era, that a service had been rendered to Ibsen by offering a tribute to his notoriety and by creating such revulsion toward the imitation that one was inclined to feel kindly toward the original. "We have all heard of the young lady who would not sit and listen to a dull preacher because he made her 'feel so un-Christian,' and Mr. Buchanan's humour had a parallel effect on several earnest anti-Ibsenites" in the audience.<sup>3</sup> "Many ladies," reported a popular women's weekly, "thought it worse than silly, and voted it vulgar."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"At the Play," Observer, June 7, 1891, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Daily Telegraph, June 3, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>"The Avenue. The Gifted Lady," Era, June 6, 1891, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>'Momus,' "Plays and Players," Gentlewoman, June 13, 1891, p. 801.

Except for The Gifted Lady, the Ibsen burlesques of 1891 were widely enjoyed. The variety of styles in which parodists wrote,<sup>1</sup> the selection of journals in which they published, and the packed houses at Toole's reflects a diverse market for Ibsen satire, and suggests that knowledge about Ibsen was not as restricted as some of Ibsen's detractors insisted. From early March until the end of June, Ibsen was a fashionable, widely recognized, though contentious topic. As J.H. McCarthy stated, the burlesques at Toole's and the Avenue were "the most decisive tribute of recognition that has yet been paid in London to the influence, to the importance, to the genius of Henrik Ibsen," and neither his enemies nor his friends could call him "a 'man of no account,' at a time when he and his creations were made the objects of satire in two leading London theatres by two well-known English authors."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as the summer lull approached and Ibsen performances ceased, absenting 'the master's' name from the press, non-Ibsenites declared a victory over Ibsenism, and their satiric creativity ended.

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<sup>1</sup>For more examples of versified commentaries, see "The Ibsen Girl," in St. James's Gazette, April 25, 1891, p. 5; "Fin de Siecle," also in St. James's Gazette, January 27, 1891, p. 4; Max Beerbohm's "Drinking Song," rpt. in Jones, 1930, pp. 353-4; and "An Independent Criticism," St. James's Gazette, March 17, 1891, p. 6. Heather Gordon's "Nora Helmer's Farewell," Life, January 31, 1891, p. 120, is a poetic tribute to Nora's actions.

<sup>2</sup>"Pages on Plays," Gentleman's Magazine, July 1891, p. 103.

End of Season Stocktaking: "The Ibsen Question"

As one theatre after another closed for the summer vacation, McCarthy took advantage of the lull by reflecting on the winter and spring season, summing up the outward accomplishments of Ibsenites:

This year will certainly be remembered in dramatic annals as the Ibsen year. A number of his plays were played in rapid succession; one went into the evening bill and ran for some weeks. Ibsen was the chief topic in theatrical circles. Actors and actresses who had never heard of the Norwegian dramatist before became excited by the controversy and grew eager to appear in 'an Ibsen play.'...Five of Ibsen's most remarkable plays were thus presented to the public this year, and four of them for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

On the surface, all traces of the Ibsen boom seemed to disappear suddenly and completely after the final performances in June. Had Norreys secured a theatre to run A Doll's House, Ibsen might have gained a new hold, but according to the I.S.D.N. of June 20, Ibsen's Ghost struck the final blow to the controversy.

It is curious to note how the Ibsen craze came and went. A little more than a few days ago controversy raged, Ibsen was being played, more Ibsen was threatened, articles were written, paragraphs appeared, and the nervous may have apprehended that Ibsen had come to stay; but there was really no fear of such a misfortune. Mr. J.M. Barrie's neat and pointed little parody at Toole's Theatre was a thousand times better than any number of solemn replies to Ibsenite fanatics...and I fancy has done much to put the finishing stroke to the preposterous outbreak.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J.H. McCarthy, "Pages on Plays," Gentleman's Magazine, August 1891, pp. 204-5.

<sup>2</sup>"Circular Notes," I.S.D.N., June 20, 1891, p. 530.

When Ibsen's name was suddenly dropped, non-Ibsenites declared a victory over the tiresome fetish. On July 4, the London correspondent to the New York Dramatic Mirror confidently reported: "Ibsen is dead as the proverbial door-nail in London."<sup>1</sup>

The assertion that Ibsen was 'forgotten' is in sharp contrast to some anti-Ibsen critics' intermittent insistence that Ibsen was never known, except to a very small group of supporters and ghouls. Theatre-goers (claimed the Stage) had patiently allowed Ibsen to be tried, but since he had failed there was no need to carry on testing play after play, for Ibsen had been "played enough to be played out," and could disappear forever more.<sup>2</sup> Archer remarked that "to hate him is easy, to ignore him impossible," but many non-Ibsenites came close to ignoring his effect during the Ibsen Year.<sup>3</sup>

What can be said for the attractive power, the vitality, the human worth of works which...can hold out on the most cosmopolitan of stages only fugitively for a few afternoons and evenings! This is not the way of a Colossus....there has seldom been a more tedious jog-trot than this elderly Scandinavian gentleman's.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, not everyone had been convinced that Ibsen would modernize the English stage. Not everyone recognized in him a world class dramatist whose works were tragedies of modern, everyday life. Archer argued

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<sup>1</sup>N.Y.D.M., July 4, 1891, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>"Exit Ibsen," Stage, June 4, 1891, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>William Archer, "The Free Stage and the New Drama," Fortnightly Review, November 1891, p. 665.

<sup>4</sup>"The Dramatic Year -- I.," Leading article, Stage, December 24, 1891, p. 9.

that the recognizability and immediacy of Ibsen's characters gave them greater impact than those of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Shakespeare, but this view was far from universally held.<sup>1</sup>

Many critics' inability to perceive the importance of Ibsen led to friction within the critical fraternity, as 'new critics' applied the 'Ibsen Test' to measure the sanity of their bretheren. Meanwhile, the 'old critics' asserted that scholarship, taste, and dramatic instinct could exist in critics who do not revere Ibsen, and that their dislike for the New Drama did not jeopardise their critical consciences.<sup>2</sup>

Archer persistently returned to the Ghosts controversy to illustrate the shortcomings of English criticism:

I don't know that Sarcey...understood Ghosts much better than Mr. Clement Scott did. But at least he remained sane over it. He treated it rationally and respectfully, confessing that he did not see very much in it, that the motives and sentiments seemed to him foreign and bizarre, but owning that he was probably not at the right point of view for estimating it. Other critics -- M. Jules Lemaitre, for example -- were equally respectful and much more appreciative. All felt themselves in the presence of a serious piece of literature, to be discussed, analyzed, possibly condemned, but certainly not to be spat upon, execrated, and if possible drowned in a whirlpool of noisome epithets .....French critics are more or less experienced, more or less routine-ridden, more or less jaded, theatrical journalists.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 664. s.a. William Alison, "Ghosts. II," Playgoers' Review, April 15, 1891, pp. 130-1.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, 'Momus,' "Play-things," Gentlewoman, April 18, 1891, p. 527.

<sup>3</sup>Archer, Fortnightly Review, op cit., pp. 669-70.



Confrontations with Ibsen's brand of reality were very painful for the late-Victorians; for a public accustomed to adapted French farces and formulaic comedies it was an intensely shocking experience to suddenly witness the rending of society's paragons in an expose of fin du siecle spiritual bankruptcy.

Non-Ibsenites' expressions of shock can be classed in eight major categories of objections:<sup>1</sup> 1) Ibsen represents the insidious force of theatrical anarchism in his rejection of convention and institutionalism, 2) Ibsen is juvenile, provincial, and un-English, and therefore not worthy of attention, 3) Ibsen is wholly didactic and unartistic, 4) Ibsen's literary form is crude and immature, with flawed construction, 5) Ibsen takes liberties with established moral and social precepts, his work is diseased, his characters depraved, and his purpose is exclusively to revolt audiences with the unrelieved meanness of life, 6) Ibsen misrepresents life, nature, and reality in false science and philosophy, 7) Ibsen is incomprehensible and unintelligible, and 8) Ibsen is dull and undramatic. Ibsen was too avant-garde to achieve mass appeal in 1891, but those who desired an intellectual drama were encouraged by the achievements of the season. By October, Archer claimed that Nora Helmer and Hedda Gabler were as well and as widely known in England as Jane Eyre and Becky Sharp.<sup>2</sup> Curiosity over what

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<sup>1</sup>See Buchanan, 1891, pp. 376-80; William Alison, "The Methods of Anti-Ibsenite Criticism," Playgoers' Review, March 16, 1891, pp. 86-8; and Quarterly Review, April-June, 1891, pp. 308-10. Critical objections to Ghosts, when specified, often reflect objections to other plays but in a more extreme form. For summaries of accusations levelled at Ghosts, see Jennings, 1973, and William Alison, "Ghosts. II," Playgoers' Review, April 15, 1891, pp. 130-2.

<sup>2</sup>G.W. Dancy disputed this, writing that "one can only suppose that in his enthusiasm he [Archer] has lost all sense of proportion, or that -- and

was new and strange attracted many people to Ibsen, as did his supporters' claim that through him a new era in the drama was dawning.<sup>3</sup>

Many non-Ibsenites admired aspects of Ibsen's plays, and discovered in them guidelines for the renaissance of native drama. Could not the wide and distinctive vista of Ibsen's observation be emulated by English dramatists without incorporating those aspects that are destined to offend the majority? Could not English characters exhibit something of the truthfulness and finesse of Ibsen's without also being morbid? Could not the style of Ibsen's dialogue be adapted, bringing stage English closer to ordinary speech, without sacrificing eloquence and wit? Even some anti-Ibsen critics recognized that "the so-called Ibsenism, coming at the right moment, and arousing more or less latent energies, has helped forward the solution that may ultimately be found in a new dramatic school."<sup>4</sup> Though the I.T.S. was perceived by many as an organ of Ibsenism, it was also regarded as a mechanism for freeing art from commercialism, facilitating the revival of drama as a literary art form.

"Is Ibsenism to become a serious revolutionizing influence upon the stage, or is it to die out as a fad and a fallacy?" -- this was the Ibsen Question in the summer of 1891. Progressive critics and playgoers irked by the old formulas of drama were eager for a new dramatic messiah, and heralded the Ibsen Year as the beginning of a

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there seems some evidence of the existence of this theory in his mind -- he recognises no world...outside his own narrow circle." ("Literary Critics," *Theatre*, December 1, 1891, p. 262.)

<sup>3</sup>See *Quarterly Review*, *op cit.*, pp. 305-6.

<sup>4</sup>"Exit Ibsen," *Stage*, June 4, 1891, p. 9.

revolution.<sup>1</sup> Professional critics' response to Ibsen has been examined at length, but what did ordinary playgoers think of Ibsen, and how wide was his appeal?

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<sup>1</sup>Oswald Crawford, "The Ibsen Question," Fortnightly Review, May 1891, p. 725. s.a. Archer, Fortnightly Review, op cit., p. 663.

CHAPTER SIX  
POPULAR REACTION

Dear Miss Robins,

I apologise abjectly for looking like a stone, but what would you have had me look like? A rabid Ibsenite? Of course I couldn't help applaud, and I didn't want to hiss, and how otherwise I was to testify my emotion I really can't imagine....You are quite right about Clement Scott -- he and Moy Thomas sat together and kept up a subdued snigger all the evening. Yet I wonder you should have got the impression the audience as a whole was unfriendly.

(William Archer)<sup>1</sup>

Although playgoers occasionally recorded their impressions of plays in letters to editors and in private correspondence, these playgoers tended to be notorious in their own right, and unrepresentative of the run-of-the-mill members of the popular audience. Journalistic reviews and columns containing theatrical gossip are by far the best source of commentary on audience response and estimates of attendance. In 1891, critics were fascinated by the composition of the new Ibsen audience, and took pains to identify individuals and types in the house; consequently, more can be discerned about Ibsen audiences and their response to plays in 1891 than in any other year. The Star

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from William Archer to Elizabeth Robins, [May 3?, 1891], Fales Library.

and Globe sometimes listed the most noteworthy first nighters (or first afternoons, in the case of matinees), particularly at Ibsen premieres, but they only account for that section of the community that was 'nameable' and prominently displayed in the stalls, boxes, and front row of the circle. The 'nameless' patrons in other sections of the house added little glamour or prestige to the Ibsen movement, but it was they who were responsible for the financial success or failure of productions, who caused runs to be extended or matinees to be repeated, and whose numbers represented (however roughly) the extent of interest in particular plays at particular times and the 'palatability quotient' of Ibsen's themes. In 1891, 'nameless' patrons were more important than ever before, as Ibsen's potential fame spread from the select readers of sixpenny reviews (before 1889), to conscientious followers of theatrical trends and topics (after the Doll's House professional premiere), to all types of theatre-goers and readers of all sorts of periodicals.

The 'nameless' were not faithful Ibsenites, reverently crushed (well-worn scripts in hand) into the pit -- though there were plenty of those -- but also included the curious, the unconvinced, the sceptic, the vociferous dissenter, the trendy, the attention-seeker, the quietly appreciative, and the reserved admirer. Ibsen audiences at this time were hardly an accurate cross-section of the London theatre-going public -- Ibsen was too contentious, too radical, too foreign for the average person, and too irresistibly controversial and taboo for the above-average. In October 1891, one commentator in the Era remarked

that the playgoing public still preferred revivals of twenty-year old plays by Robertson to "brand new exotics" like Ibsen,<sup>1</sup> but it should be remembered that even the most popular dramatists experienced competition from entertainments even more alluring than the legitimate theatre. Each entertainment was destined to find its own audience, and the 'higher drama' had the most stringent requirements of all, as Shaw explained:

The success of such plays depends upon the exercise by the audience of powers of memory, imagination, insight, reasoning, and sympathy, which only a small minority of the playgoing public at present possesses. To the rest the higher drama is as disagreeably perplexing as the game of chess is to a man who has barely enough capacity to understand skittles. Consequently, just as we have the chess club and the skittle alley prospering side by side, we shall have the theatre of Shakespeare, Moliere, Goethe, and Ibsen prospering alongside that of Henry Arthur Jones and Gilbert; of Sardou, Grundy, and Pinero; of Buchanan and Ohnet, as naturally as these already prosper alongside that of Pettit and Sims, which again does no more harm than the music halls do to the waxworks or even the ratpit.<sup>2</sup>

Most Ibsen performances in 1891 were matinees, which further limited the potential audience, but the fact that many of these matinees attracted full houses is impressive. The first evening presentation, Ghosts, had particularly atypical witnesses, for though the small Royalty Theatre was packed to the rafters at both the dress rehearsal and press nights, Ghosts subject and unlicensed state demanded that its audiences consist only of the most daring of all theatre-goers; furthermore, the prerequisite of I.T.S. subscriptions ensured that attendance be planned in advance to attend, and the price of admission

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<sup>1</sup>Theatrical Gossip," Era, October 3, 1891, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>G.B. Shaw, Appendix to 1891 edition of the Quintessence of Ibsenism, rpt. Shaw, 1958, pp. 8-9.

excluded the usual pit and gallery crowds. Hedda Gabler, which had a normal evening run during May, had slightly out of the ordinary audiences, even though many persons probably attended to see the superb acting, and not because of the play's or the playwright's renown.

Reports of the constituents and distribution of Ibsenites and non-Ibsenites in the audiences sometimes differ antithetically. Remarking on the evening run of Hedda Gabler, the Saturday Review incidentally revealed that the audience in the pit and gallery were little acquainted with Ibsen and certainly not appreciators of his extraordinary qualities.

Remarkable, indeed, has been the fate of Hedda Gabler at the Vaudeville. Only last week this pretty theatre was unto the worshippers of the shrine of Ibsen as a sort of temple, and the denizens of the stalls and dress circle were even more interesting objects for study than the odd drama itself. Their enthusiasm for their idol used to inspire his interpreters; and certainly the matinee performances of Hedda Gabler were vastly superior to those which take place now nightly at Mr. Thorne's theatre, although the cast remains unaltered. The moment the theatre was thrown open to the British public, which pays its shillings and its pence to enjoy an amusing or be thrilled by an exciting play, the aspect of things changed as if by magic. The pit and gallery watched in blind amazement the vagueries of the lunatic Hedda, and listened to the crudely coarse dialogue with stupefaction.<sup>1</sup>

In the May issue of the Fortnightly Review, Oswald Crawford, an Ibsenite, implied that the plays had been protected from fully-fledged pittites by matinees and subscription houses prior to Hedda Gabler's shift to the evening bill, and accused Ibsen's friends of shrinking from the experiment of subjecting the plays to "the great practical ordeal of the play-house," meaning the experience of being "truly and

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<sup>1</sup>"Before the Footlights," Saturday Review, May 9, 1891, p. 562.

fully and continuously submitted to 'the tumultuous judgment of the pit.'<sup>1</sup> He also corroborated the Saturday Review report by implying that the composition of the afternoon pit and gallery audience was unusual, i.e. that it was not the rowdy, judgmental crowd that was reputed to have copied Clement Scott's frowning poses, and that, in Scott's absence, might have booed down Ibsen just on principle. In contrast, the 'Captious Critic' of the I.S.D.N. abandoned his seat in the stalls and ventured to explore the pit and gallery during a performance of Rosmersholm, just to find out what Ibsenites were like.

However uncharitable it may be to judge people by their looks, yet most of us do, either consciously or because we cannot help it; and, although we possibly make mistakes now and then as to individuals, I fancy that we get pretty near the truth in looking at humanity in a crowd. On the afternoon of the production of Rosmersholm at the Vaudeville, I went into the pit and upstairs to get among the audience and see what Ibsenites were like. Never before, except at an entertainment for the mentally or physically afflicted -- at an asylum concert or hospital treat -- had I encountered so many deformed faces; so many men and women pale, sad-looking, white-lipped. It was like an assemblage of out-patients waiting for the doctor. I seemed to feel in the midst of unhealth, chronic feebleness of the body, which could expect no help from the brain. Of course, if this sort of congregation -- it was a sort of congregation rather than a public -- finds pleasure in the stuff by which from time to time certain apostles of Ibsen here prove his futility -- for practical purposes -- and their own, there is no reason why the gratification should be denied it.<sup>2</sup>

It is significant that this critic sought the Ibsenites in the cheapest sections of the house, where the devotees of the drama were habitually found, and where (in the usual critical estimation) Ibsen was not being properly tested in the way that popular playwrights like Pinero, Jones,

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<sup>1</sup>Oswald Crawford, "The Ibsen Question," Fortnightly Review, May 1891, p. 725.

<sup>2</sup>I.S.D.N., March 7, 1891, p. 893.



and Grundy were proven. Despite the 'Captious Critic's' anti-Ibsen slant and the malice with which he described the Ibsenites, it is notable that he contradicted the accounts of the Saturday Review and Crawford by locating Ibsenites among the 'unnameables' of the playgoing public.

Though reports of audience distribution at 1891 Ibsen matinees differ markedly, distribution is one aspect of the Popular Audience that can be considered generically. Other aspects, such as audience size, composition, reasons for attendance, and observable in-house response to the plays differ from production to production, as public knowledge of Ibsen and attitudes toward him changed and as the performance conditions and publicity differed. In the following section, these factors are considered for each production, with brief comments on the two parodies that received critical notice.

#### "A Doll's House" (January)

Press estimates of attendance at the January 27 matinee of A Doll's House indicate that most, if not all, of the 888 seats in Terry's Theatre were taken. Between the various reckonings of the house being "fairly filled," "crowded," "full, even crowded," and "packed" falls the less committed but safest adjective: "large." The press is less helpful in determining who made up that audience. The Star and People spotted a large assemblage of 'nameable' performers,

authors and other celebrities, and list them,<sup>1</sup> and the Evening News and Post pleaded that "in justice to our theatre-goers it must be said that a large proportion of the audience seemed to be professional, and therefore pecuniarily [sic] unprofitable in character,"<sup>2</sup> but the Speaker disagreed about the unprofitability of the afternoon:

Perhaps the most encouraging feature of the whole affair was the presence in the house of a large contingent of people of a kind seldom, if ever, seen at average matinee performances...the kind, namely, which pays for its seats in hard cash.<sup>3</sup>

Walkley implied that these paying members were Ibsenites, and that the lucrative Doll's House matinee could force defamers to change their view that Ibsen is unprofitable, ergo unpopular:

Just now many earnest persons are heard to express their sorrow that Mr. Robert Buchanan or Mr. George R. Sims cannot be induced to see that Ibsen, after all, is not exactly a fool by comparison with Mr. Robert Buchanan or Mr. George R. Sims; but how many of these, when confronted with the old question, 'How much are you sorry,' are prepared to answer, like the faithful ones of Tuesday, 'The price of a theatre ticket'? The Buchanan tribe we have ever with us, and ever shall have...but it seems, nevertheless, that there is actually 'money in' Ibsen -- which is perhaps the one reason that may induce the British Philistine to think better of him.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Star identified: Francis Johnson (Mrs. Cashel Hoey), John Todhunter, A.W. and Myra (Holme) Pinero, Alfred Cecil Calmour, Edward Rose, Thomas Thorne, Ella Bannister, T.B. Thalberg, Marion Lea, Arthur Stirling, Walter Lacy, Basset Roe, C. Forbes Robertson, Acton Bond, Alexia Leighton, and Mr. and Mrs. Stannard. ("Mainly About People," January 28, 1891, p. 1.) The People noted Mrs. Willard, Haddon Chambers, Genevieve Ward, W.H. Vernon, and G.R. Sims ("The Actor," February 1, 1891, p. 4). Henry James (see Robins, 1932) and Bernard Shaw (see Shaw Diaries) were also in attendance.

<sup>2</sup>"Two Plays," Evening News and Post, January 28, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>[A.B. Walkley], "The Drama," Speaker, January 31, 1891, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

The Queen stated that "the theatrical profession and Ibsen enthusiasts mustered in great force at Terry's," and the Referee stated that the followers of William Archer, "Mr. Ibsenmonger," were "well represented" at the performance, but neither source suggested a proportion of Ibsenites to non-Ibsenites.<sup>1</sup> The Era and Daily Chronicle, however, asserted that the majority of the audience was unconvinced of the alleged attractions of Ibsen.<sup>2</sup>

Several reasons for playgoers' attendance at A Doll's House were suggested in the press. It seems that some people were attracted by the current controversy surrounding the translation of Hedda Gabler.<sup>3</sup> Others were drawn by more general curiosity about Ibsen and the growing interest in him, and by the lingering reputation of the 1889 presentation of the same play. J.H. McCarthy wrote that the performance "attracted the attention that anything by Ibsen does, happily, attract just now in London," and Walkley observed that "the public interest in Ibsen is evidently still keen, is, indeed, waxing rather than waning, or such an unpretentious performance as that of yesterday afternoon

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 1 "Between the Acts," Queen, February 7, 1891, p. 205; and 'Carados,' "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, February 1, 1891, p. 3.

2 "A Doll's House," Era, January 31, 1891, p. 10; and "Terry's Theatre," Daily Chronicle, January 28, 1891, p. 5.

3 Evening News and Post, op cit.; and "At the Play," Observer, February 1, 1891, p. 7.

could not have attracted the large audience that it did."<sup>1</sup> The play was already infamous, even among the female readership of the Queen, and recognizable as an object of fun to the readers of Punch.<sup>2</sup>

On the subject of the audience's response to the Fraser production of A Doll's House, Clement Scott presented the calmest, most panoramic view of all the critics.

...it was curious...to watch the effect of the first dose of Ibsen on a singularly attentive and intelligent audience. As the sermon proceeded -- it is not a play -- the close observer could almost feel the impression made on the varied minds of the spectators. The sceptical opened their mouths and swallowed it as if it had been manna from the dramatic heavens; the religious scoffed at it; the matter-of-fact exposed its astounding fallacies and nudged their neighbours to emphasize their convictions; the serious opened their eyes at it, and the witty likened it to the extravagant satires of Swift or the methodical dramatic topsy-turviness of W.S. Gilbert. This remark has not been made before to our knowledge....But let the truth be told. The play swayed and interested the audience to an individual. The novelty of the new dramatic religion was so astounding that people of all creeds sat still and opened their eyes.<sup>3</sup>

According to this account, the play fulfilled each spectator's expectations (the dubious found food for cynicism, the religious affirmed the righteousness of their beliefs in the act of contrasting them with Ibsen's, the literal found a playground for logic and satisfyingly exercised reason within it, the sober indulged their gravity, and the

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<sup>1</sup>"Pages on Plays," Gentleman's Magazine, March 1891, p. 321; and 'Spectator,' "The Theatre. A Doll's House at Terry's," Star, January 28, 1891, p. 2

<sup>2</sup>"Everyone is now tolerably familiar with this extraordinary drama..." (Queen, op cit.) A Punch cartoon with the caption "Ibsen in Brixton" depicts a very matronly woman pausing on her way out the door to say to her husband, "Yes, William, I've thought a deal about it, and I find I'm nothing but your Doll and Dickey-Bird, and so I'm going!"; an open copy of "Nora" by Ibsen lies on the floor (Punch, May 2, 1891, p. 215).

<sup>3</sup>"Terry's Theatre," Daily Telegraph, January 28, 1891, p. 3.

bright cleverly found new insight) but it also provided what they had not expected: absorption. Scott's closing remark, "And so the audience melted away into the Strand, puzzled, perplexed, interested, shocked -- certainly not amused," indicates that the play failed to provide his own preferred element of dramatic entertainment, but that it was a moving dramatic entertainment nonetheless. In this admission, the doyen differed sharply from some of his so-called imitators.

Other critics were specific about the behaviour of the audience, particularly regarding displays of approval and disapproval. The Daily Chronicle, for example, recorded that the philistines laughed at Dr. Rank's afflictions and heritage, and "further tittered when after the doomed man's confession in the half-darkened room of his long-concealed love for Nora Helmer that lady suddenly suggested that the servants should bring in the lamp."<sup>1</sup> The Evening News and Post's critic contradicted himself when he stated that the audience was "a fine solid body of listeners, who gave generous recognition to the good points of the show, and did not laugh very offensively at the bad ones," and then recorded that the audience's failure to take the author seriously "must have greatly hurt the feelings of the faithful disciples who were present to hear some of his most pathetic and philosophical work laughed at as if it were a farcical comedy."<sup>2</sup> The Morning Post and Saturday Review recorded that the Linden-Krogstad scene was enthusiastically received, while the Daily Chronicle and Standard specified that it was the only scene to be genuinely

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<sup>1</sup>Daily Chronicle, op cit.

<sup>2</sup>"Two Plays," Evening News and Post, January 28, 1891, p. 1.

applauded, and the Observer stated that the tarantella sequence was the only one "which seemed to excite vivid interest."<sup>1</sup> Walkley was greatly moved by Robins' performance in her final scene, and claimed that she "drew tears from many hardened playgoers in the audience."<sup>2</sup> The Standard described the final scene of Act III as receiving "anything but reverent attention," but the Observer recorded that the audience listened "with respectful attention to the eloquent reproaches showered by Nora on her husband's head because he, poor commonplace man, has never talked seriously with her upon the duty of truth-telling or warned her that forgery is a crime."<sup>3</sup> The "tribute of tears" that Joseph Knight said the "haunting pathos" of the play elicited "stimulates the imagination and furnishes food for after thought," but connotes quite a different mood from the Morning Post's report that though great attention was paid to the early scenes, Nora's later actions antagonized English feeling, preventing "the final reception from being as cordial as was evidently expected," and the Evening News and Post's information that "the curtain fell in almost dead silence on the final serio-comic situation."<sup>4</sup>

More generally, the Saturday Review recorded that though the play may have shocked some people, it "proceeded amid considerable applause and comment," and the Globe stated that "all was received with

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<sup>1</sup>Observer, op cit.

<sup>2</sup>Speaker, op cit., p. 130. s.a. 'Spectator,' "The Theatre. A Doll's House at Terry's," Star, January 28, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>"Terry's Theatre," Standard, January 28, 1891, p. 3; Observer, op cit.

<sup>4</sup>"Drama," Athenaeum, January 31, 1891, p. 161; Morning Post, op cit.; and "Two Plays. A Doll's House at Terry's...," Evening News and Post, January 28, 1891, p. 1.

attention, and interest and applause were liberally bestowed. Laughter at what was intended to be serious was, however, not seldom heard, and words of disapproval and even of protest seemed rung from reluctant lips."<sup>1</sup> The Era accredited the "natural" and "earnest" acting with keeping the audience's patience throughout the "seemingly interminable talk" so that "attention was arrested, interest was awakened, [and] admiration was compelled," yet the Standard implied that not even the flawless acting could overcome the audience's preference for the wholesome drama, and when the play was concluded there was little enthusiasm.<sup>2</sup> The correspondent for Punch, who it might be assumed was not a regular theatre critic since he signed himself "One Who Paid for a Place in the Pit," concluded that as the audience filed out of the theatre "more in sadness than in anger," the performance had not been worth the price of admission.<sup>3</sup> Reports of greater and lesser laughter, applause, interest, comment, absorption, and indifference among the audience seem to be affected by critics' individual bias and subjective judgment, but perhaps the inconsistency also reflects the mixture of persons who made up the audience, their uneven emotional involvement, the controversiality of the play, which was due, as the Sunday Times critic stated, to its intellectual appeal, "unusual ethical point of view," and "question of immediate moment."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Before the Footlights," Saturday Review, January 31, 1891, pp. 135-6; and "A Doll's House," Globe, January 28, 1891, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Era, op cit., and Standard, op cit.

<sup>3</sup>"Playtime for a Doll's House," Punch, February 7, 1891, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup>"Plays and Players," Sunday Times, February 1, 1891, p. 7.

"Rosmersholm"

At the first matinee of Rosmersholm the Vaudeville was filled to its capacity of 740 persons. The Star described the theatre as "packed from floor to ceiling" while John Todhunter (the stage manager and financier) was "besieged with requests for admittance."<sup>1</sup> The matinee sold out far in advance of the performance, prompting the management to announce a second performance before the success of the first had even been proven.<sup>2</sup> According to the staunch anti-Ibsen critic of the Graphic, success was guaranteed:

Experience indeed has shown that, given a theatre of moderate dimensions, nothing is more easy than to fill it by announcing one of the modern dramas of this writer at a morning performance. As with most new sects, the number of the Ibsenites is limited; but there is at least enough of them to give one morning performance an air of prosperity ...if the majority of [the spectators] attend again --which is more than probable, because the Ibsenite appetite is not easily appeased, and because the opportunities of seeing an Ibsen play in London do not occur every day -- there is reason to believe that the venture may prove equally remunerative.<sup>3</sup>

The second performance was not quite as successful: "Paper had to be resorted to...though not to any monstrous extent. The takings were, in round numbers, £90 at the first, and £50 at the second performance ....[Todhunter] lost about £10 over the affair."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Mainly About People," Star, February 24, 1891, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, and "The Vaudeville," Stage, February 26, 1891, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>"Ibsen at the Vaudeville," Graphic, February 28, 1891, p. 243.

<sup>4</sup>Shaw, letter to Charrington, March 30, 1891, in Laurence, 1965, p. 288.



Rosmersholm, like A Doll's House, attracted many theatrical and literary celebrities who took places in the dress circle and boxes,<sup>1</sup> but many more 'unnameable' patrons were also in attendance. The 'unnameable' contingent was a mixture of Ibsenites and non-Ibsenites, and as before the proportions given by the press vary depending on the reporter's outlook. The Nation's critic, in a detailed despatch to American readers, observed that,

...the crowd, as might have been expected, was largely made up of actors and actresses...and of the long-haired men and 'aesthetically' draped women who haunt socialistic gatherings and private views -- people whose soulful appreciation could be counted on beforehand. The average playgoer was conspicuously absent.<sup>2</sup>

McCarthy spotted "all Ibsen's most devoted admirers [and] all Ibsen's most conspicuous assailants rallied for the occasion."<sup>3</sup> Scott stated that the spectators included intelligent, emancipated playgoers, "believers" and "agnostics" alike, and so was an abnormal audience.<sup>4</sup> Certainly the patrons of the pit and gallery who normally assembled for evening premieres were absent. 'Carados' of the Referee implied that the audience was composed of a slightly more representative cross-section of matinee-goers, including:

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<sup>1</sup>The Star lists Henry Arthur and Doris Jones, Beerbohm Tree, Thomas Thorne, T.B. Thalberg, John and Mrs. Todhunter, Mr. Forman and Alma Murray, Wilton Jones, Gertrude Kingston, Mrs. Benson, Laura Linden, William Archer, Marie Fraser, Elizabeth Robins, Elsie Chester, Otho Stewart, and Mr. Patram (op cit., p. 1). The People also indicated that Lily Linfield (Mrs. Baldry) and Edith Kennard were present (March 1, 1891, p. 4), and Shaw's diaries mention "Berlya and his wife" and "Norman."

<sup>2</sup>'N.N.', "Ibsen's Rosmersholm," Nation, March 12, 1891, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup>J.H. McCarthy, "Ibsen up to Date," Hawk, March 3, 1891, p. 237.

<sup>4</sup>"Vaudeville Theatre," Daily Telegraph, February 24, 1891, p. 3, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 167.

...a strong detachment of the noble army of deadheads, a goodly muster of the apostles of Ibsen, a very fine and large array of the critical fraternity, and a few unfortunate and unsuspecting mortals who had put their money down at the doors in the hope of getting some relief from the fog.<sup>1</sup>

The "panting public of Ibsenites" espied by the critic of the St. James's Gazette did not take all the seats, for the Era's critic found "a good many of Mr Gilbert's 'young ladies of fifteen.'"<sup>2</sup> Scott also believed that the presence of women at Rosmersholm was worth noting, but the critic for the Daily News identified these women as Ibsen devotees.

The little theatre, we need hardly say, was filled with the faithful. All prominent Ibsenite men were to be seen among the gathering. There were also of prominent Ibsenite women not a few. Many sat, book in hand, and all were sober and serious-minded. Something, indeed, akin to the 'Wagnerian hush', of which musical devotees profess to be conscious when they enter the sacred town of Bayreuth, could be distinctly felt in the atmosphere of the place.<sup>3</sup>

Not all of the 'faithful' in the audience were firm in their beliefs, for though the performance attracted Ibsenites who "came to pray," many of them "remained to scoff":

Some amongst the audience there doubtless were who came unprepared to receive with anything but jeers a kind of dramatic production with which they were unfamiliar -- to 'leave 'arf a brick at the stranger, simply because he was a stranger. But others there were who came quite ready to pray -- at what seemed, indeed very like a conventicle service -- but found themselves involuntarily scoffing at the wilfully

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<sup>1</sup>"Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, March 1, 1891, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>"White Horses and Mill-Pools. Ibsen at the Vaudeville," St. James's Gazette, February 24, 1891, p. 5; and "Theatrical Gossip," Era, February 28, 1891, p. 10, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup>"An Ibsen Service," Daily News, February 24, 1891, p. 6, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 165.

inartistic method, the far-fetched and even ridiculous detail, and the painfully confused aim of Ibsen's stagework as it is here displayed.<sup>1</sup>

The most lengthy consideration of the composition of the audience came from Frederick Wedmore, in the Academy. He asked: 'Who are the 740 people to whom Ibsen's views commend themselves -- the people who attended this performance of Rosmersholm?':

'Who are these people?' it may be asked. Well, they are not the large public, the steady-going playgoers on whom a manager's prosperity depends, and who, without fine taste perhaps, yet like all manner of wholesome meat, from 'Hamlet' to 'The Rivals,' from 'Lights o' London' to 'Carmen up to Date.' They are not ordinary cultivated people -- the refined professional classes -- who, in a generation that has given to English Browning and Tennyson, Newman and Liddon, somehow do not quite unanimously echo Rosmer's opinion, 'There is no judge over us.' Whether they are 'the very poor,' the enlightened East-enders, for instance -- just now the faddists' court of final appeal -- those to whose subtle intelligence and chastened hearts a great revelation is in the very nature of things most likely to be vouch-safed -- we really cannot say. Miss Farr, the actress -- to judge from an interview which a reporter of an evening paper had with her -- apparently thinks that they are....She counts on 'the smart people,' it would seem, as a possible audience. Singular and unjustified ambition! She will, of course, never get them. Smart people do not like anything so dull as the play with which we were regaled on Monday.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"At the Play," Observer, March 1, 1891, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Wedmore, "The Stage," Academy, February 28, 1891, p. 217. c.f. "The Latest Ibsen Actress. An Interview with Miss Florence Farr," P.M.G., February 23, 1891, p. 3. Interviewer: "The public you will most touch, Miss Farr, will be emphatically the smart people and the clever artisan and the eccentrics; you will but horrify the great middle-class B.P.?" Farr: "Yes, 'smart' people are so much more human and so much less conventional; and the very poor, if only I could get them, would be sure to understand and feel and appreciate."

"The very poor" may well have taken the cheaper seats, but they could not have afforded seats in the dress circle, where 'Momus' of the Gentlewoman encountered "a group of openly professed Ibsenites, Socialists, and Agnostics" -- the demi-mondes of 'smart' society, whom Wedmore excluded.<sup>1</sup>

Playgoers' reasons for attending Rosmersholm included, in addition to those of A Doll's House, a curiosity about an Ibsen play that had not been performed previously in London, and that (compared to Ghosts and A Doll's House) had been left to the side of the critical affray. Archer recommended it beforehand as "the strongest dose of 'Ibsenism' that could well be administered to the British public; and that makes the experiment...more interesting."<sup>2</sup> "It was probably because it was felt by theatre-lovers to be such a genuine test case," wrote the Nation's correspondent, "a case between the old and the new dramatic schools -- that the house was crowded from stalls to gallery."<sup>3</sup> Ibsen had already 'caught on,' and after the first matinee, Rosmersholm became recommended fare for thinking playgoers and "all interested in the intellectual life of our times."<sup>4</sup> Some playgoers, too, were probably curious to see whether Florence Farr was equal to her task.

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<sup>1</sup>'Momus,' "Rosmersholm by Henrik Ibsen," Gentlewoman, February 28, 1891, p. 302; rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup>"Ibsen's Rosmersholm and the English Stage," Black and White, February 21, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup>Nation, op cit.

<sup>4</sup>"Vaudeville Theatre, Rosmersholm," Daily Graphic, February 24, 1891, p. 9.

Three comments on the audience's response to Rosmersholm recur: 1) that the house behaved in a respectful manner and displayed interest in the play;<sup>1</sup> 2) that despite the respectful decorum, some audience members could not repress laughter at certain moments in the action;<sup>2</sup> and 3) that the play mystified the majority of the onlookers. The assertion that the play "bored even the Ibsenites," and the comment that "the spirits of the Ibsenites themselves were dashed by the dreary but unconvincing pessimism" of the piece are contradicted by reports like this one: "At the fall of the curtain there was loud applause and but the faintest attempt at hissing, so that the Ibsenite disciples were in high glee at the success of the experiment."<sup>3</sup> At any Ibsen performance where the 'uninitiated' mingled with the devotees, some laughter and derisive comments were inevitable.

...though the attitude and behaviour of the great majority could not have been more reverent, unless they had knelt on entering or buried their faces in their hats, there were in

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<sup>1</sup>e.g.: "On the whole, the play went off very well. It was not nearly so much 'guyed' as the presence in the pit of a knot of frivolous young people might have led one to expect. Only at the more irresistibly absurd passages was a guffaw or a giggle heard." (People, op cit.)

<sup>2</sup>The P.M.G mentioned that the audience enjoyed the Low comedy of Brendel's make-up (February 24, 1891, p. 7); the Globe recorded that "the heartiest guffaw attend[ed] the exposition of the Ibsenite view as to feminine redemption and the means of restoring masculine faith," and that "the moral lesson of Ibsen and his quasi-tragic view of the results of heredity were laughed out of court" ("Rosmersholm," February 24, 1891, p. 3); the Era's critic judged that "the majority amongst Tuesday's audience who were not of the Ibsen school laughed irreverently when they were not yawning, and doubtless would have laughed more but for the respect compelled by the earnestness of the artists engaged" (Era, op cit.); while the Globe suggested that discretionary cutting would have minimized the merriment ("Plays and Players," February 26, 1891, p. 6).

<sup>3</sup>Truth, March 5, 1891, p. 179, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 180; s.a. "At the Play," Observer, March 1, 1891, p. 7; and Stage, op cit.

the depths of pit and gallery some who laughed, as Scrub says, 'consumedly' at those extravagances of speech and action with which the play is so liberally endowed.<sup>1</sup>

Rosmersholm was more 'advanced' than other Ibsen plays seen and heard to date, and so it was particularly difficult for the 'uninitiated' to grasp the finer points of the action. Rebecca's retort to Kroll's insinuation that her mother had been unfaithful in marriage, for example, inspired an explosion of laughter. Walkley mentioned the "loud gibes of the anti-Ibsenites who at Ibsen performances always muster in great force and talk at the top of their voices just to show...their don't-care-a-damnateness," but the audible chatter of 'Momus's' companions and their exchange with a near-by group of Ibsenites was not meant to be discourteous toward the play, the playwright, or the admirers, but was probably an expression of what seems to have been a dominant sentiment among the 'uninitiated' that afternoon: "What -- is -- this?"<sup>2</sup>

The laughter was probably most prevalent in the first acts, diminishing toward the last in favour of perplexity. Shaw wrote: "The third act was a great success; and the last one, though it was an utter staggerer, silenced the scoffers, the curtain falling amid a curious dumfounderment."<sup>3</sup> The critic of the Black and White even called the performance "a great success," adding that "here and there at intervals a laugh or two broke the gravity with which the audience received the

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<sup>1</sup>"Ibsen at the Vaudeville," Graphic, February 28, 1891, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup>'Spectator,' "Vaudeville Theatre," Star, February 24, 1891, p. 2; and Gentlewoman, February 28, 1891, p. 302, rpt.in Egan, 1972, pp. 171-2.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Shaw to Charrington, March 30, 1891, in Laurence, 1965, p. 288.

strangest play that has perhaps ever been seen upon a London stage," yet "for the most part the most honest attention was given the tragic story."<sup>1</sup> The Evening Standard found that "occasional flashes of unconscious humour provoked much laughter from the irreverent, and those were all that lightened one of the most tedious afternoons that even frequenters of matinees are called upon to endure," yet Clement Scott observed that "the desperate earnestness of the acting all round hushed down many a laugh that bubbled to the surface."<sup>2</sup> The Playgoers' Review recorded that the performance ended with faint and forced applause, and the Sunday Times had the audience smiling and sneering as they filed out of the theatre, but the Nation reported that audience members lingered in the lobby and entrance for a half hour after the play to discuss it.<sup>3</sup>

### "Ghosts"

The I.T.S.'s announcement that Ghosts would be performed at a hall in Tottenham Court Road on March 6 received such overwhelming response that J.T. Grein instead secured a larger theatre, the Royalty (capacity 657), for a performance one week later. Even at the subscription price

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<sup>1</sup>Black and White, February 28, 1891, p. 126, rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 172-3. s.a. J.H. McCarthy, Hawk, *op cit.*, p. 237; "Between the Acts," Queen, February 28, 1891, p. 343; and I.S.D.N., February 28, 1891, p. 843.

<sup>2</sup>"Rosmersholm at the Vaudeville," Evening Standard, February 24, 1891, p. 3; and C. Scott, "The Playhouses," I.L.N., February 28, 1891, p. 290.

<sup>3</sup>B.W. Findon, "Rosmersholm. II," Playgoers' Review, March 16, 1891, p. 93; "Plays and Players. Rosmersholm," Sunday Times, March 1, 1891, p. 7, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 176; and Nation, *op cit.*, p. 217.

of £2 10s for each member and guest, the Royalty was sold out days before the 13th, and so the I.T.S. also invited the public to the dress rehearsal on March 11th. "The many who were unable to secure seats for the actual performance flocked to this dress rehearsal two nights before. So well was it attended that the occasion assumed the air of a Society function."<sup>1</sup> The stalls were almost full, and several actors, actresses, and critics attended. The press night, too, attracted a cultured audience, and the Star reported the rumour that a smattering of royalty had attended incognito, along with other celebrities. The management's receipts equalled its expenditure of about eighty pounds.<sup>2</sup>

The customary pit, gallery, and last-minute crowds were absent from this performance, owing to prohibitive admission prices and the legal necessity of pre-booking. Ghosts' audience, therefore, was unquestionably composed of the 'compact majority' of Ibsenites and Ibsen sympathizers with the means to attend (along with critics, the most fashionable dilettantes, and invited guests), with few dissenters.<sup>3</sup> Not only was the audience elite, but their distribution

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<sup>1</sup>Orme, 1936, p. 82. At least one critic feared that the Lord Chamberlain would prevent the performance, so to be sure of seeing it he attended the dress rehearsal. Judging from the positive tone adopted in his notice, however, he was not the same critic who wrote the review of the play for the following issue (see People, March 15, 1891, p. 4; and "The Independent," People, March 22, 1891, p. 6). Writing criticism of previews was not the normal practice.

<sup>2</sup>Orme, 1936, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup>"It was a cultured audience which filled the Royalty Theatre last night almost to overflowing, and most of the faces were of a singularly refined type. The play was listened to with breathless attention. Mr. Gus Harris occupied the pit box on the O.P. side, and probably thought that the performance might be improved by a procession of Norwegian peasants. Mr. Edmund Gosse was in a box on the same side of the house, but Mr. William Archer was lecturing elsewhere. Lord Londesborough and Lord Pembroke were amongst the audience, and there was a tale about two



among the various portions of the house was uniform.<sup>4</sup> It was an accepted fact that Ghosts could not be shown before an ordinary English audience, or even an ordinary Ibsen audience in 1891 (though Moy Thomas claimed to have recognized "the faces that have become familiar to those whose duty it has been to attend these melancholy gatherings"),<sup>5</sup> owing to the wrath that could have arisen in the middle classes at the showing up of Pastor Manders.<sup>6</sup> Some critics interpreted the I.T.S.'s private clientele as disrespectful of the regular theatre-going public, and as proof that it produced improper material. The I.T.S. patrons exhibited some courage -- and considerable determination -- in their decision to see Ghosts, and the papers were predictably horrified that even 657 Londoners could be found to attend.

In a city like London, however, there is always a certain percentage of nasty-minded persons who will pay handsomely for the gratification of seeing...such a play as Ghosts. It has, from the point of view adopted by advocates of Ibsen, the advantage of being so desperately offensive that they will regard the dulness [sic] as more than compensated. That

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carriages from Marlborough House, and a party of royalties incog. Lady Colin Campbell was also there..." ("Mainly about People," Star, March 14, 1891, p. 1). Contrary to the report, William Archer was definitely in attendance, as were Bernard Shaw, H. Massingham, and Florence Farr (Shaw Diaries).

<sup>4</sup>Since the subscription fee was standard, seats were probably allotted on a first-come first-served basis, or on the lottery system used by the Stage Society later in the decade.

<sup>5</sup>"The Independent Theatre," Daily News, March 14, 1891, p. 6, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 194.

<sup>6</sup>The feeling against the play is indicated by quotes such as these: "Ghosts is an impossible play for English audiences, and, we imagine, for most foreign ones" ("The Royalty," Stage, March 19, 1891, p. 10.), and "...that such a play could ever be produced before a mixed audience is, in this country, an utter impossibility" ("Ghosts," Theatre, April 1891, p. 205). s.a. 'V.T.' [Lady Colin Campbell], "The Independent Theatre," World, March 18, 1891, p. 426.

the directors of the Independent Theatre should pander to vicious tastes and talk at the same time about the elevation of Art, is a matter of course.<sup>1</sup>

The anti-Ibsen papers insisted that most of the audience attended Ghosts with very nasty motives (implying that claims for the play's artistic merit were unfounded) and that the I.T.S. simply capitalized on depraved tastes.<sup>2</sup> The critics judged that the public was curious about the nature of men who patronized such a play -- and if they were curious about the men, they were fascinated by the women.

Ibsen was not considered suitable fare for chaste, respectable females -- his characters' behaviour was too extraordinary -- but Ghosts' reputation was especially black. Its characters discussed relationships and afflictions about which English ladies were meant to be completely ignorant, and if they happened not to be ignorant then they were supposed to be uninterested in the subject and appalled by its nomination to the stage. But the audience contained many women, a lot of whom were young, and they "listened attentively to the dramatic exposition of a subject which is not usually discussed outside the walls of a hospital."<sup>3</sup> Many of the women present understood the play, and "sat through it without a blush."<sup>4</sup> "Which shall we

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<sup>1</sup>"Ghosts and Volcanoes," Saturday Review, March 21, 1891, p. 351.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Aveling remarked that a large number of anti-Ibsen partisans were in attendance. "Some of them at least came with the intention, if opportunity offered, of what is known so vulgarly as 'guying' the show. In several parts of the house there was certainly more than one spectator who meant [to lead laughter] in the wrong place if it was possible. But they quickly found it was impossible." ("In the Stalls," Life, March 21, 1891, p. 1338.)

<sup>3</sup>Daily News, March 15, 1891, p. 6, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 194; 'Carados,'

"Dramatic News and Gossip," Referee, March 15, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>"The Independent Theatre," Times, March 14, 1891, p. 7.

question," asked the Era, "their modesty or their intelligence? If they understood it all, they disgraced their sex by their presence, and in some instances by their openly expressed approval of an unclean thing." Yet any women who failed to comprehend the play were also damned by the Era: "If they did not understand it, then we can but pity them in their want of perception, for in Ghosts it is not necessary to look between the lines for the nastiness which is laid on thickly as with a trowel."<sup>1</sup> Scott implied that the women who went to Ghosts out a perverse desire to be shocked went home disappointed -- the nastiness was merely inferential. Nevertheless, women who could listen to Ghosts must be courageous, and Scott was surprised to see so many of them turn up on March 13:

...strange to say, women were present in goodly numbers; women of education, women of refinement, no doubt women of curiosity, who will take away to afternoon teas and social gatherings, the news of the sensation play that deals with subjects that hitherto have been to most men horrible and to all pure women loathsome.<sup>2</sup>

A correspondent in the Era said these words of Scott's "should be printed in letters of fire, and burned into the souls of audience, authors, and actors alike."<sup>3</sup>

On the whole, the anti-Ibsenites who attended the play had a very dull evening, but unlike the audience at Rosmersholm, they did not find an opportunity to shout disparaging outbursts until the end of the performance.<sup>4</sup> When Grein appeared for his curtain speech, one woman in

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<sup>1</sup>"Ghosts," Era, March 21, 1891, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>"Royalty Theatre," Daily Telegraph, March 14, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>James Carter-Edwards, "Ibsenility," Letter to the Era, May 2, 1891, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>"Men, actuated by a spirit of inquiry or humour, and women instigated by a spirit of curiosity, came to see something spicy. They found a play

the stalls naively queried, "Oh, is that Ibsen," which threw her neighbours into fits of laughter. At the end of the play, a spectator in the gallery who cried out "It's too horrible," was shouted down with indignant calls for order and the suggestion, "Then go back to the Adelphi!" People described the gallery crier as representative of "the old sympathetic desire for expression of the sweetness and light of human nature in theatrical entertainment," and judging from the hostile response in the press, there was more than one spectator who agreed with him.<sup>5</sup> The Era's critic was shocked by the audience's response to the very first scene of the play: "We marvel and are ashamed to have to relate that an English audience sat silent and unprotesting through the opening passages of a piece in which this Jacob Engstrand audaciously propounds his scheme to make of his dead wife's daughter a prostitute and a decoy."<sup>6</sup> The first act was very loudly applauded,

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that bored them to distraction. They came to gloat, and they remained to yawn. If the reformers have no better dramatic fare to offer than Ibsen's 'Ghosts,' I don't think the fifty shilling subscriptions will roll in very fast to the exchequer of the enterprising Dutchman who has a soul for art, but also a very keen eye to the main-chance!" ("The Ibsen Folly," Truth, March 19, 1891, p. 601.) Compare the I.S.D.N.'s assessment: "The truth about the 'Independent Theatre' lies in a nutshell. So long as Mr. Grein produces nasty plays, nasty-minded people will go to see them, and pay handsomely to do so. If Mr. Grein produces plays that are not nasty, his enterprise will fail; because playgoers can see good plays, at the regular theatres, infinitely better represented than they possibly would be by the scratch companies of fourth rate actors out of work that Mr. Grein can engage." ("Circular Notes," April 4, 1891, p. 12.)

<sup>5</sup>"The Independent," People, March 22, 1891, p. 6. s.a. "Ghosts at the Royalty," Daily Chronicle, March 14, 1891, p. 3; "The Independent Theatre," Morning Advertiser, March 14, 1891, p. 6; "Drama and Music," News of the World, March 15, 1891, p. 6; "The Much-too-Independent Theatre. Ghosts at the Royalty," St. James's Gazette, March 14, 1891, p. 12; and Daily News, March 14, 1891, p. 6, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 194.

<sup>6</sup>"Ghosts," Era, March 21, 1891, p. 10.

though (according to Shaw) "a third of the applauders were startled into silence" after the second act, and after the third act "four fifths of them were awe-struck."<sup>1</sup> The Observer reported "uncontrollable laughter" over the "abortive straining after impressive effect in the forcible-feeble climax" of Act II, though the ultimate effect, according to the Daily Graphic, was very moving as "few of the spectators failed to feel the awful force of the morbid tragedy" after have listened attentively, even to the "grim humours" of the piece.<sup>2</sup> The play concluded with "mingled applause and hissing,"<sup>3</sup> but "in the main," judged the Globe, "the public attitude was friendly" -- even if the critical one was not. The Ibsenites "warmly applauded" the performers and the strongest scenes of the play, and "loudly cheered" during Grein's speech.<sup>4</sup>

Ghosts convinced few non-Ibsenites of the Ibsenites' claims for 'the Master,' and it is unlikely that offended spectators were eager to see a repeat performance. Isidore Gordon-Ascher, a correspondent in the Era's "Ibsenility" exchange, typified non-Ibsenite reaction: "A little of the Master goes a long way -- I am satisfied with this little. My cravings for spiritual nourishment -- for moral teachings -- have been appeased with this noxious dose of medicine. I did not like the taste and I don't mean to take any more of it."<sup>5</sup> The Academy

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<sup>1</sup>Letter to Charrington, March 30, 1891, in Laurence, 1965, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup>"At the Play," Observer, March 15, 1891, p. 6; and "The Independent Theatre. Ghosts," Daily Graphic, March 14, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>"The Royalty," Stage, March 19, 1891, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>"The Independent Theatre of London," Globe, March 14, 1891, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>Isidore Gordon-Ascher, "Ibsenility," Letter to the Era, April 4, 1891, p. 15.

claimed that Ghosts succeeded in alienating the literary public and the cultured general public from the aims of the I.T.S., but this claim is not fully justifiable.<sup>1</sup> Leonard Outram made this point:

It is not quite understood that the offensiveness of such a play as Ghosts may not have been observed by many who witnessed it, especially by the ladies who were present, until pointed out by those whose capacity for appreciating art and literature is dominated by a sense of the disgusting. So long as the grossness of the story was left in subjection, its skilful evolution and tremendous combinations afforded enjoyment to the pure and artistic mind.<sup>2</sup>

'A Woman,' a correspondent in the P.M.G., faced up to the hard lessons of the play and explained and condemned the reaction of Clement Scott and his clan:

It is the spirit of exclusiveness, and not the sense of purity, that is outraged in these people. It is more horrible to them that a section of cultivated people should have a knowledge of the existence of evil than that another section should live the life which has been revealed to the multitude by the Whitechapel murders [the 'Ripper' murders, a contemporaneous topic]. Sir, I take it as one of the best signs of the times that the growing sense of responsibility for the lives of others, the growing desire that righteousness shall prevail not in one section but in all, no longer permits pure women to turn their eyes from sin and degradation, but compels them to face the evil and do what they can to remedy it. A thoughtful working-man told me that he had witnessed with great interest the representation of 'Ghosts' and that it was as good as 'three sermons in one.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Stage Notes," Academy, March 21, 1891, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup>'Paster Manders' [Leonard Outram], "Ibsenility," Letter to the Era, March 21, 1891, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Letter, P.M.G., March 17, 1891, p. 2.

"Hedda Gabler"

The first sustained presentation of an Ibsen play began on April 20, when Hedda Gabler was offered for five consecutive matinees. There was some doubt that the play would attract audiences in the first week, despite a fairly large turn-out for the premiere. The Vaudeville was not as full as it had been for Rosmersholm<sup>1</sup> -- probably because Hedda Gabler had been announced for five afternoons instead of just one --but the play was well received, and theatre-goers were advised on April 21 that "if the little Vaudeville is not fuller for the next four afternoons...the public is a fool."<sup>2</sup> Attendance soon picked up, the box office was besieged, and on one afternoon forty pounds had to be turned away.<sup>3</sup> As Robins and Lea quickly discovered, they had the makings of a popular hit, and attendance at a second week of matinees prompted Thomas Thorne, the lessee, to replace the unprofitable Money with Hedda Gabler in the evening bill, where it remained from May 4-30. The public's curiosity about Ibsen, the palatability of Hedda Gabler, and the producers' zeal conspired to convince Thorne of the feasibility of the move, but the likelihood of pecuniary gain was probably his first

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 1"The Actor," People, April 26, 1891, p. 4.

2"An Ibsen Success -- Hedda Gabler at the Vaudeville," P.M.G., April 21, 1891, p. 2.

3"Ibsen Again," Dramatic Review, May 2, 1891, p. 220.

consideration.<sup>1</sup> After ten matinees, Robins and Lea netted profits of £281, but by the time they paid the salaries of the idle Money cast and those of their own company, they had nothing left by the end of May.<sup>2</sup>

The evening run of Hedda Gabler made an Ibsen play accessible to the 'regular' theatre-going public for the first time since 1889, but attendance flagged, the response was less demonstrative, and the acting suffered.

A certain amount of interest naturally attached to the bold adventure of offering Ibsen, in his most Ibsenite mood, to an audience of ordinary 'unemancipated' playgoers; though the interest, after all, did not prove strong enough to fill the Vaudeville on Monday night....The audience...did not become at all enthusiastic, nor did they openly hoot or scoff. They simply sat still, stolid and silent....the chilling indifference of its reception, the lassitude of the audience, and the feeble applause which acknowledged even such admirable acting as that of Miss Robins and her companions, may be attributed to astonishment, or apathy, or disgust....Missing the stimulating applause which had been so liberally showered upon their efforts by matinee audiences mainly composed of the new cult's devotees, the performers on Monday night tried...to raise the temperature of the house by resorting to over-emphasis.<sup>3</sup>

Unsympathetic critics pounced on Hedda's misfortune, arguing that even exemplary acting could not make Ibsen popular. By West End standards, a six week run was short (though it was the longest running <sup>premier of an</sup> Ibsen play

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<sup>1</sup>"Hedda Gabler, repeated at Vaudeville matinees up to Friday, has continued to command the support it had in opening representations. Curiosity and the craze combined have filled the house, and success, I find, has converted some of those who halted between two opinions, and has enrolled them among the worshippers of 'the Master.' This being thus, Thorne has decided to put the piece into the evening bill on Monday..." ('Carados,' "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, May 3, 1891, p. 3)

<sup>2</sup>William Archer, "The Mausoleum of Ibsen," Fortnightly Review, July 1893, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 311. s.a. Cima, 1980, p. 153-4.

<sup>3</sup>"Theatres and Music. Ibsen at the Vaudeville," Sunday Sun, May 10, 1891, p. 6.



in the period under consideration), and this was taken as definitive proof of public disinterest and the futility of future productions. Despite the tremendous verbal advertisement Ibsen incurred, the playgoing public just did not take to him:

The present season has been, in actual results, disastrous for the Norwegian playwright. Four of his dramas have been acted for the first time in London, for one night, two afternoons, five afternoons, and a few weeks respectively and the rumours of future productions, once so loud, are heard no more.<sup>1</sup>

Ibsenite critics saw the situation differently, and except for George Moore (who wondered if the public was "congenitally unfit to appreciate a good play")<sup>2</sup> they accentuated the positive features. Knight wrote that "under difficult conditions, and in face of opposition scarcely short of persecution, [Robins and Lea] have made a gallant fight, and have enabled a large number of playgoers to judge for themselves of a work that has caused one of the keenest controversies of the day."<sup>3</sup> The Globe critic believed that, despite the anti-Ibsenites' conclusions regarding the short run of Hedda Gabler, "A fortnight of matinees, and four weeks of evening performances (with Saturday matinees)...is a very fair 'run' for a play by a foreign writer which had been denounced by a certain number of professional censors even before it was produced."<sup>4</sup> Ibsen's sympathizers were proud that they had made Ibsen accessible to the general theatre-going public, and considered thirty eight performances a major victory.

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<sup>1</sup>"Theatrical Gossip," Era, May 30, 1891, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>George Moore, "Our Dramatic Critics -- II," P.M.G., September 10, 1892, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Athenaeum, April 25, 1891, p. 546.

<sup>4</sup>"Plays and Players," Globe, May 28, 1891, p. 6.

Among the 'nameable' patrons at early performances of Hedda Gabler were prominent intellectuals, theatre managers, and socialists.<sup>1</sup> The 'unnameable' sector was composed differently during the afternoon and evening performances. Anti-Ibsen critics reported that the first matinee audience consisted mainly of Ibsenites (a group that "cannot be accepted as a fair sample even of the educated public"), with the balance being a "picked audience, prepared at least to think on the play and critically watch the acting."<sup>2</sup> Scott described the audience as an assemblage of intelligent playgoers, all of whom had read and re-read the script, yet the shocked reaction that he attributed to them seems implausible for an assemblage of Ibsenites.<sup>3</sup> The Daily Chronicle, however, stated that though there were many Ibsenites at the matinees, "with these the general public joined in hearty appreciation."<sup>4</sup>

Though Robins and Lea relied mainly on the highbrow, educated public for support in the afternoons, early in the evening run the conventional pit audience also became their patrons,<sup>5</sup> and by the end of the run, they received considerable support from the gallery:

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<sup>1</sup>Audience members included George Meredith, Thomas Hardy (Robins, 1932), Oscar Wilde (who attended twice -- see The Letters of Oscar Wilde, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis, London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), Henry James, Charles Wyndham, H.B. Tree, Thomas Thorne ("Plays and Players," Globe, April 23, 1891, p. 6), H.A. Jones, Robert Buchanan (Globe, April 30, 1891), Austin Fryers (Playgoers' Review, May 15, 1891, p. 155), Shaw, Salt, Graham Wallas (Shaw Diaries), John Burns (Laurence, 1965), and William Alison (Playgoers' Review, May 15, 1891, p. 155).

<sup>2</sup>"Hedda Gabler at the Vaudeville," Daily News, April 21, 1891, p. 6; and "Our Play-box. Hedda Gabler," Theatre, May 1, 1891, p. 258.

<sup>3</sup>"Vaudeville Theatre," Daily Telegraph, April 21, 1891, p. 3; and "The Playhouses," I.L.N., April 25, 1891, p. 550.

<sup>4</sup>"Ibsen's Hedda Gabler at the Vaudeville Theatre," Daily Chronicle, April 1, 1891, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup>"Plays and Players," Globe, May 7, 1891, p. 6.

All we can say is that our audiences from the first have been both enthusiastic and intelligent, being alive to everything in the play, and it is pleasant to note that, as the days go on, we get a wider range -- I mean, a different set of people come to see us. Even the gallery overflows with keenly interested spectators: this was not so much the case at matinees, when our public, of course, nearly all knew Ibsen already.<sup>1</sup>

Archer presaged this reaction when, after the first performance, he wrote that even the most philistine in the extraordinary pit audience were as fully absorbed as the audience at Our Boys ten years before.<sup>2</sup>

Initial reviews recommended the play to curious playgoers in search of "a novel and unless they are too prejudiced, a stimulating experience," to the fashionable and intelligent of London, and to the most discriminating of art lovers.<sup>3</sup> Hedda Gabler was "the talk of the hour" even though (according to the People) it had not been "boomed" as much as the earlier Ibsen productions.<sup>4</sup> Acclaim of Robins' performance quickly spread, and the play became the talk of the town. "Curiosity and craze combined to fill the house," and playgoers who longed to be wicked but who could not stomach Ghosts flocked to see the latest Ibsen novelty fresh from the author's pen.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Hedda Gabler. An Interview with Miss Elizabeth Robins and Miss Marion Lea," I.L.N., May 30, 1891, p. 720. This remark is in contrast to George Moore's comment that Therese Raquin, which the I.T.S. presented later in the year, "will prove caviare to the general public; it will interest some four or five thousand people -- those who are interested in literature -- and then the piece will fall flat as Hedda Gabler did when it was put in the evening bill." ("The Independent Theatre," Letter to the Editor of the Times, October 13, 1891, p. 5)

<sup>2</sup>Letter from William Archer to Elizabeth Robins, April 23, 1891. (Fales Library.)

<sup>3</sup>"Hedda Gabler," Globe, April 21, 1891, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>"Momus," "Plays and Players. Hedda Gabler at the Vaudeville," Gentlewoman, April 25, 1891, p. 558; and "The Actor," People, April 26, 1891, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>"Carados," "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, May 3, 1891, p. 3.

Some spectators were 'converted' to Ibsenism by the production, and many more were impressed by the leading actresses:

Whether or not witnessing the play...has had the effect of turning every pittite and stallite into an Ibsenite remains an open question, but certain it is that even against their better instincts the audiences have to a man -- and woman -- become Hedda Gablerites and Mrs. Elvstedites.<sup>1</sup>

Hedda Gabler's propensity for 'converting' playgoers to Ibsenism was a source of anxiety for anti-Ibsen critics, but Ibsenites delighted in it. George Moore, relieved to see eager attentive faces in the auditorium, was gratified to hear the constant comment "He has almost convinced me" in the corridors, between acts.<sup>2</sup> Even some anti-Ibsen critics, while maintaining personal objections, could not deny that the audience greatly admired and was moved by the artistry of the drama. The noblest admission came from Scott, who wrote: "The audience was spellbound. I grant it. Those who came to laugh remained to pause, if not to pray."<sup>3</sup> In the Daily Telegraph, he described how this conversion might come about.

The audience sat with their mouths open, gaping, staring at the scene, astonished that Art, the mistress of the beautiful, could give heterodoxy and ugliness so much power. It was not until the theatre was left behind, it was not until the people began to reflect on what they had seen, it was not until the marsh lights had faded out, it was not until 'the sermon's text' was taken up once more that it was perceived how the art of acting can give ugliness and repulsiveness so weird, so absorbing, and so dangerous a fascination.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>I.L.N., op cit.

<sup>2</sup>St. James's Gazette, op cit.

<sup>3</sup>I.L.N., op cit.

<sup>4</sup>Daily Telegraph, op cit.

Ibsen's advocates, needless to say, disagreed. W. Outram Tristram, author of the Haymarket's successful The Red Lamp, asserted in his letter to the St. James's Gazette that,

...it is not the morbid study of a diseased society which rivets the audience, but the consummate art and force with which the dramatist has handled his materials...it is Miss Robins who makes us swallow the pill, by bringing to the portrayal of the part qualities not distinguishable from genius.<sup>1</sup>

The play undoubtedly interested its audiences, and on the whole it received a very respectful, courteous response. Audiences were, it seems, so reluctant to miss a word of dialogue that the riotous jibes

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<sup>1</sup>W. Outram Tristram, "More About Hedda Gabler," Letter to the St. James's Gazette, April 24, 1891, p. 4.

and laughter that previous Ibsen productions had endured gave way to quiet attention.<sup>1</sup> Hedda Gabler seized the imagination of the public, and its catch-phrases were introduced into common use.<sup>2</sup>

"The Lady from the Sea"

Unlike the previous Ibsen productions of 1891, the series of five matinees of The Lady from the Sea (May 11-15) had dismal attendance figures. Though the premiere drew a reasonable contingent of actors and actresses, Ibsenites, and anti-Ibsen partisans, the tame and uncontroversial subject of the drama failed to draw the curious and the fashionably daring to the theatre.<sup>3</sup> The audience was scanty and

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<sup>1</sup>"Not only were no signs of dissent or disapproval to be heard at the Vaudeville yesterday afternoon -- there was only one occasion when the somewhat uncomplimentary laughter which Ibsen's naivetes are calculated to provoke, was audible. When the hero of Hedda Gabler, arriving home, received with gratitude the slippers worked for him by his dying aunt...a 'snigger' was, perhaps naturally, provoked from the audience. That the remainder of the action, even when duller -- and its opening passages are not too lively -- had some hold on the public, was shown by the general stillness of the spectators, and their reluctance to lose a word that was spoken." (Globe, op cit.) Although there was one report that references to Hedda's pregnancy inspired giggles and whispering among the ladies in the audience ('Carados,' "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, April 26, 1891, p. 2), the P.M.G. pronounced that "There is no question that the play caught hold of the audience. Some who went to curse, not inaudibly blessed; and to many who went willing to bless it was a dramatic revelation. Critics who feel that it is expected of them may pretend that they were shocked or that they were bored. But they certainly followed the play for three good hours with every outward sign of lively interest." ("An Ibsen Success -- Hedda Gabler at the Vaudeville," April 21, 1891, p. 2, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 220.)

<sup>2</sup>E.g.: "Good God! People don't do such things" ("Theatrical Gossip," Era, May 2, 1891, p. 10, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 234), and "vine leaves in his hair," which became a euphemism for drunkenness (Hawk, May 19, 1891, p. 544, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 252).

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Robins, Marion Lea, Marie Fraser, Florence Farr, and Alice Wright were present ('Theatrical Gossip,' Era, May 16, 1891,

probably did not, according to the saying, pay for the gas. After the excitement engendered by Ghosts and Hedda Gabler, gossip writers were loath to say much about The Lady from the Sea, and the production passed with comparatively little comment or publicity. Audience reaction to the play was unfavourable: it received outbursts of unsympathetic laughter and contempt, and left the spectators bored and puzzled.<sup>1</sup> It even depressed and disappointed the Ibsenites though they tried to look positive and optimistic and to applaud energetically. "The anti-Ibsenites were jubilant in the stalls of Terry's Theatre," wrote the Evening News and Post's critic, "and the faithful disciples hung their heads and whispered together sympathetically, and confessed to the unregenerate that they always thought The Lady from the Sea would prove too delicate and fanciful a work for the beefy British critic."<sup>2</sup> Anti-Ibsen commentators rejoiced at the plain failure of the

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p. 20), as were as Gertrude Warden, Charles Sugden, Maud Milton, Mr. Abingdon, Kate Rorke, Lucy Buckstone, May Whitty, Marie Linden, Laura Linden, Agnes Hewitt, Fred Horner, and Bronson Howard ("The Lady from the Sea," Globe, May 12, 1891, p. 6).

<sup>1</sup>"Those who came to listen attentively remained to scoff, the ripple of laughter which was almost continuous during the fourth and fifth acts being evidently very disconcerting to the unfortunate performers." (Standard, May 12, 1891, p. 3, rpt. in Egan, 1972, p. 246.) The play "was received...with much yawning, together with occasional outbursts of derision." ("The Drama, Ibsen Again," Daily News, May 12, 1891, p. 3.) "It proved dull throughout, and unconscious naivetes of some of the characters produced derisive laughter, which no follower of 'the Master' had the courage to suppress." (Globe, op cit.) According to the I.S.D.N., the play was received with "ribald contempt." ("Drama," May 23, 1891, p. 358.)

<sup>2</sup>"Terry's Theatre. Another Ibsen Play -- The Lady from the Sea Produced Yesterday," Evening News and Post, May 12, 1891, p. 1.

show. Ibsen "was delivered into their hands, and they made the most of their opportunity....[he] was crucified as the lions were crucified on the road to Carthage."<sup>1</sup>

"A Doll's House" (June)

Despite the weather, Norreys' revival of A Doll's House attracted a full house into the Criterion Theatre (capacity 675) on the sunny afternoon of June 2. The assembled crowd of Ibsenites and Norreys supporters included many stage performers.<sup>2</sup> Critics' remarks about audience response are very contradictory; some reviews record that the audience was fascinated by the play and by the interpretation, while others found the afternoon dull and disappointing either because their enthusiasm for Ibsen was waning or because Norreys' performance was unsatisfactory. Reaction to the Crystal Palace performance is unknown.

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<sup>1</sup>J.H. McCarthy, "'The Lady from the Sea,'" Hawk, May 19, 1891, p. 550.

<sup>2</sup>"It was pleasant to notice at Miss Norreys' Criterion matinee on Tuesday...that she had not forgotten her brothers and sisters in art. Look where one would, professional ladies and gentlemen were to be seen." The report names Herbert and Maud Tree, Vane Featherstone, George and Mrs. Alexander, Fred Terry, Blanche Horlock, Minna Le Bert, Marie Lewes, May Jocelyn, Marie Fraser, Elizabeth Robins, Rachel de Solla (Mrs. Abingdon), Lady Monckton, Mrs. de Solla, Herbert Waring, Ben Greet, Sid Brough, Alam Stanley, Edward Rose, Irene Vanbrugh, Maude Milton, Marion Lea, "and many others too numerous to mention." ("Chit Chat," Stage, June 4, 1891, p. 9.)



### Parodies and Burlesques

Audience response to the two major burlesques was very different: Ibsen's Ghost played to packed houses until Toole left for a provincial tour at the end of June, and The Gifted Lady played to poor houses and closed after five performances. The general public had high hopes of both productions and welcomed a chance to see comic justice done to the dramatist that had dominated theatre talk all season. Ibsen's Ghost was advantaged by being associated with Toole rather than Buchanan, but the Ibsen audience was receptive to anything that relaxed the unrelenting seriousness of the originals. Barrie's half-hour spoof inspired incessant laughter from spectators of all persuasions, but at the Avenue it was not long before everyone was bored by Buchanan's parody. It started off well enough, with unrestrained laughter, but toward the end the laughter hollowed and thinned. "Many ladies," reported 'Momus,' "thought it worse than silly, and voted it vulgar."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the final applause was friendly, the calls were enthusiastic, and the author was summoned before the curtain.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Momus," "Plays and Players," Gentlewoman, June 13, 1891, p. 801.

<sup>2</sup>"Toward the close...the joke fizzles out altogether, and the applause which follows the descent of the curtain is meant to compliment the author rather upon what he had intended than upon what he has accomplished." ("The Avenue," Stage, June 4, 1891, p. 10.)

Attendance

Because of contradictory and heavily biased press reports, it is, in many cases, impossible to be certain about popular response to Ibsen performances. Even so, except for The Lady from the Sea and The Gifted Lady, all the Ibsen dramas and parodies played to packed, or at least good, houses and received some acclaim from pro-Ibsen writers. The following chart shows estimates of overall attendance in order to give an impression of attendance during the 1891 season.

PLAYS	Venue	House Capacity	Approx. Percentage of Capacity in Attendance	Number of Performances	Total Attendance
A Doll's House	Terry's	888+	90%	1	800
Rosmersholm	Vaudeville	740	no.1 100		
			no.2 70	2	1,258
Ghosts	Royalty	657	100	1	657
Hedda Gabler	Vaudeville	740	75	38	21,090
Lady from the Sea	Terry's	888+	30	5	1,530
A Doll's House	Criterion	675	100	1	675
	Crystal Palace	1,739	?	1	?
Totals				49	26,010
PARODIES					
Ibsen's Ghost	Toole's	600	90%	27	16,120
The Gifted Lady	Avenue	1,500	40	5	3,000
Totals				32	19,120

Though these figures are only approximate, they clarify important points: 1) although five separate Ibsen plays were produced in six independent productions, about eighty percent of the accumulated

audience attended Hedda Gabler, reinforcing the idea that in terms of propaganda it was the most significant production of the Ibsen Year, and 2) although approximately 26,000 seats were filled at Ibsen performances (and many of the same people saw more than one play) about eighty five percent as many people saw parodies of Ibsen. If approximately 45,000 Ibsen seats were paid for (including parodies and dramas), this represents a very small percentage of overall theatre attendance in the West End that season, and a trifle of London's total population of four million persons, but Ibsenites did not aspire to compete with the mainstream, or hope to provide a mass entertainment. The 'inner circle' of Ibsenites simply strove to present Ibsen's plays for the delectation of that portion of the literary, educated public that was receptive to innovative artistic drama, and for the edification of authors, actors, and managers who cared to sample the works of their greatest contemporary dramatist. The almost uniformly large houses indicate that such a public existed and that at least some theatre professionals cared enough to attend. The Ibsenites' immediate objectives were, therefore, met and (contrary to anti-Ibsen propaganda) little financial loss was incurred. The large turn outs for Rosmersholm, Hedda Gabler, and both Doll's House productions further affirms that there was a public interested in seeing ambitious young actresses risk failure on the chance of making overnight reputations in quality plays that were challenging and exciting for the performers as well as the spectators.

Though the spectators at the matinees were a select community within a limited group of playgoers, the evening run of Hedda Gabler made Ibsen accessible to all theatre-goers. Ibsen's Ghost and The Gifted Lady also attracted players of all sorts, and further exemplify dissemination of interest in Ibsen among the general theatre-going public. Audience behaviour progressively improved from the rowdy, undisciplined crowd of the January Doll's House to the courteous, respectful assemblage at Hedda Gabler in April; as Ibsen's fame spread and his reputation was repeatedly tested, the 'disbelieving' sector of the audiences hushed and expressed their disapproval (if any) outside the theatre premises. All the plays (with the likely exception of The Lady from the Sea) excited controversy and managed to absorb playgoers in the action and arguments. Theatre-goers' motives for attending the plays underwent subtle alterations, from curiosity about a contentious play whose reputation lingered from a year and a half before and eagerness to praise or scoff a new fad touted by outspoken anti-establishment figures, to sincere interest in an alternative playwright who was destined to affect the mainstream and concern over the fidelity of various performers and their ability to render Ibsen excellently. Little development occurred between July 1891 and December 1892, but evolution resumed in early 1893, when the goals set by Ibsenites in 1889-90 were accomplished.

## SECTION III: IBSEN AGAIN

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## IBSENITE ACTIVITY, 1892-3

Idol of his own special circle of English readers he has long been, and their hymns of praise are beginning, it would seem, to find echoes outside the narrow limits of their band. English journals now refer with easy familiarity to 'the creations of Ibsen' when they are describing some revolting criminal case reported from the Northlands where that author found his models....Nor is it very long since our leading comic journals took the trouble to make the eccentricities of Ibsen's last dramatic heroine the object of one of its sparkling parodies -- a doubtful compliment, but such as is accorded only to a sufficiently well-known and tolerably popular writer. Trivial indications these, but they are as significant as the published portraits and notices of the author in our magazines, or as the excellently executed English versions of his works, published at easy prices, which appear in our libraries and bookshops. (July, 1892)<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the Ibsen Year, the playmaking and theatre-going communities were in a temporary impasse where they could neither go forward to embrace the New Drama nor go back and recapture glory in the old. Recent plays lacked vitality, and playgoers were not satisfied. Financially, the 1892 season was a disaster -- not only in London but also in New York, Paris, and Berlin.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Anon. "Ibsenism," London Quarterly Review, July 1892, pp.227-8.

<sup>2</sup>Leading Article, New York Dramatic Mirror, April 9, 1892, p. 4.

Theatrical journalists were too absorbed in the quarrels taking place among the critical community to guide opinion. "Even the leading critics," complained a writer in Players, "who could be instructive if they would, are becoming more and more like guerilla chieftans armed from head to foot, and continually seeking to plunge into an endless and futile warfare."<sup>1</sup> The public, too, was split into camps: a disgruntled, progressive public stirred to discontent by Ibsen or the inanities of the indigenous theatre, and a larger public no longer content with the old fare but quite unsure of what it required in its stead. British playwrights offered little consolation, for although Lady Windermere's Fan and Walker, London signalled promise in Oscar Wilde and J.M. Barrie, any commercial success was trifling compared to the ideological impact Ibsen was having worldwide.

Traditionalists thought that, given time and patience, the problem would solve itself and former tastes would prevail once again:

The theatre-goer was suddenly confronted with the question whether he would have his evenings devoted to philosophical disquisitions, and go home from them a better instructed and sadder man; or whether he would abandon the old farce of compromise between the serious and the gay, and give himself over to the burlesques, comedies with no deeper purport and aim than to make him laugh, and displays of beautiful limbs, accompanied by swift-changing and felicitous colour and soft music. It does not seem to us, on the whole, that the public is making for the learned, the reflective, and the informative. The crisis will pass; time will show whether the Ibsenites have converted the people, or merely acted as bogies, scaring them further back than ever into the domains of the simple enjoyment and relaxation seeker.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A.C. Hillier, "Critics Calmly Contemplated," Players, May 13, 1892, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>"Familiar Faces. Dr. Hendrick [sic] Ibsen," Players, June 24, 1892, p. 151.

Such commentators failed to take account of certain developments in leisuretime habits, in the press, and in playgoing tastes. In 1892, the public read more plays than ever before, including actable dramas of high literary worth, and by the end of the year more than 30,000 copies of Ibsen's Prose Dramas had been sold.<sup>1</sup> In some circles, Ibsen still meant scandal (for example, the University of London's extension centre seriously protested against a proposal for a short lecture series on Ibsen),<sup>2</sup> but the best journals reflected the widespread concern with the development of the theatre and its literature. In the absence of a revolution, many critics, playwrights, and playgoers put their faith in evolutionary change. British plays had, after all, achieved a high level of refinement in construction and characterization, lacking only the intellectual sophistication of the best continental plays to lift them from two to three dimensions. The licensing system came under increasing attack for arbitrary exercise of scruples, as in Shaw's commentary on the comic opera Incognita:

...the Lord Chamberlain...has completely cleared himself of all suspicion of Puritanical intolerance. When I saw the audience laughing at the spectacle of a father, in nightcap and bedgown, chuckling as he listened at the door of his daughter's bridal chamber, I could not help feeling how vast an advance we had made since last year, when all London was supposed to have shuddered with horror of the wickedness of that scene in Ibsen's Ghosts, where the mother in the drawing room overhears her son kissing the housemaid in the dining room.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>G.B. Burchart, "Ibsen in England," Norseman, Vol. 5, no. 2, March and April 1947, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup>Philip H. Wicksteed, "Henrik Ibsen, 1828-1906," Inquirer, June 2, 1906, p. 363.

<sup>3</sup>G.B. Shaw, Music in London, Vol. 2 (London: Constable, 1932), pp. 162-3. The opera was reviewed on October 12, 1892.

The Examiner of Plays, J.F. Piggott, declared in his testimony to the Select Committee on Theatres and Music Halls that in his study of Ibsen's plays he found all the characters "morally deranged" (the men were all "rascals or imbeciles" while the women were "dissatisfied spinsters who look on marriage as a monopoly, or dissatisfied married women in a chronic state of rebellion against not only the conditions which nature has imposed on their sex, but against all the duties and obligations of mothers and wives"),<sup>1</sup> yet he implied that he licensed A Doll's House, Rosmersholm, and Hedda Gabler out of kindness to William Archer, who as critic and translator had a pecuniary interest in their presentation. And when F.J. Furnivall proposed giving a private performance of The Cenci in a licensed theatre (the Grand, Islington), the Lord Chamberlain's office received the news without comment.<sup>2</sup>

While Pigott denied that Ibsen had a seditious effect on the morals of the British public, Archer claimed that Ibsen had profoundly affected public attitudes toward the theatre in general, and to the native theatre in particular.

'People go to see Ibsen's plays,' said a close observer, 'and they don't like them a bit -- they say they don't, and they think they don't -- they are quite sincere and unaffected about it. But when they go to see the old conventional plays they used to think so good, behold! they like them still less' ...the influence of the new movement extends far beyond

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<sup>1</sup>Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Theatres and Places of Entertainment. Great Britain Parliamentary Papers (1892), para. 5227.

<sup>2</sup>See the Lord Chamberlain's Correspondence 1, 582, nos. 43 and 44 (March 30 and 31, 1892).



those who have come personally under the spell of Ibsen....In a word, the native drama, the stock-in-trade of the ordinary commercial theatre, has lost its prestige.<sup>1</sup>

And yet how, Archer went on to ask, could this be accomplished when the "New Critics are to the Old Critics in numbers as one to ten, in opportunity for disseminating their views as one to ten thousand"?<sup>2</sup>

Simply because the old criticism worked against its time.

Mr. Clement Scott alone has done far more to write down the Scandinavian drama, the Independent Theatre, in short, the whole progressive movement, than all the New Critics together have done to write it up. His eloquence is far more copious than theirs, and he addresses, through his three organs [the Daily Telegraph, I.L.N., and Truth], a far wider circle of readers. There must, indeed, be something very much amiss in the cause which, with such an indefatigable, ubiquitous Berserk of a champion, fails to conquer all along the line.<sup>3</sup>

Scott's influence was waning. He was still widely read by "the great middle class of England, sane, sentimental, and entirely inartistic," but though his campaign against the Norwegian upstart was followed with tremendous interest, it was observed with little fidelity.

...the world went on. More and more people found in Ibsen an awakener, an uncoverer of platitudes masking under the name of virtues, a stimulus toward clearer thought and a cleaner heart. And more and more Clement Scott shouted against what he called 'Drama of the Dustbin.' He was fearless and frank -- that was why those, who did not agree with him, liked Clemmy. He poured out columns of belligerent rhetoric in the columns of The Daily Telegraph and the proprietors freely gave him his head, for he increased the sale of the paper, he made the dramatic columns famous, and if what he wrote was narrow, it was at any rate virile and virtuous.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "Drama in the Doldrums," Fortnightly Review, July 1893, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, pp. 153-4.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, 1922, pp. 257-8.

Unlike Scott's, the tastes and moral strictures of the average person were changing, which affected the popular verdict on new plays. Even from within the sheltering enclave of a private box, Scott sometimes found himself booed by the very pit and gallery audience that used to cheer him.

### Promised Projects

Curiously, Ibsenites did not deluge the playbills with production after production of 'advanced' plays to nurture latent modernism. There were announcements galore, but little came of them. Perhaps the would-be producers were frightened by the general lassitude of the theatre in 1892. Perhaps they were unable to secure financial backing. Or, perhaps they were convinced that playgoers really had been shown enough of Ibsen -- for a while at least -- during 1891. The Theatre, rather than Ibsen, was of concern in 1892. A project of considerable impetus would have been required to generate widespread enthusiasm, and the would-be Ibsen producers were probably cautioned by the lack of attention paid to their various announcements.

Janet Achurch and Charles Charrington finally returned from their world tour in late March. They signed a contract to take the Avenue Theatre from April until December, and announced that they would open with the play that had brought them so much acclaim at home and abroad -- A Doll's House. Charrington specified that he had "absolutely no intention of making the Avenue Theatre the Ibsen Theatre, or the

Realistic Theatre, or anything except a place of high-class dramatic entertainment that is tied to no school,"<sup>1</sup> but when the season was rumoured to include The Wild Duck and Hedda Gabler in addition to A Doll's House, Ibsenites became just a little smug. Marion Lea agreed to perform in A Doll's House, but since the rights to Hedda Gabler belonged jointly to William Heinemann and Elizabeth Robins, as well as Lea, that play could not possibly be a part of the Avenue season.<sup>2</sup> Lea and Robins considered presenting Hedda Gabler at a series of matinees in April, and Robins further announced that she would play Rebecca in Rosmersholm (which Shaw had also pressed on Charrington),<sup>3</sup> but nothing came of either scheme. The Independent Theatre, from which some Ibsenites must have hoped for a production of an untried Ibsen play, did not attempt such a project until 1894. Widowers' Houses was produced by the I.T.S. in December, and Shaw was temporarily labelled "The London Ibsen" and "high priest of Ibsenism," though he insisted that his ideas and methods were English.<sup>4</sup> Karin, a Norwegian play translated by Florence Bell and performed at two matinees by Robins, was also regarded as an "Ibsenish piece," but though it was favourably reviewed it did not become a great success.

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<sup>1</sup>"Ibsen at the Antipodes. Charles Charrington Interviewed," Era, April 16, 1892, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Achurh first offered Robins the part of Mrs. Linden, but Charles Wyndham was reluctant to release Robins for matinee performances and Achurh could not wait for the outcome of the contract dispute. So, Lea was then approached and signed for the role. (Cima, 1980, p. 150.)

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Shaw to Achurh, April 21, 1892, in Laurence, 1965, p. 337. Shaw also encouraged Achurh to try Hedda Gabler, with Lea as Thea Elvsted (p. 338).

<sup>4</sup>Gerould, 1963, p.143.

In the end, A Doll's House was the only Ibsen play seen in London in 1892, alongside Beata, rewritten from Rosmer of Rosmersholm (1891).<sup>1</sup> In early October, Henry James, William and Frances Archer, the Charringtons, and Robins travelled to Brighton for a few performances of A Doll's House and Hedda Gabler. According to James, A Doll's House went atrociously but the second play, with Robins in the title role, was somewhat better. As Thea Elvsted, Miss Achurch was so much better in the 1st act than at any moment of the D.H. that one hoped a real coup for her -- but she went to pieces swiftly in lemon-coloured satin (!!!) and staginess, and regurgitated and ranted till you couldn't believe it. She made a loud, showy, belle-femme, Medusa-Thea.<sup>2</sup>

She had given Charrington an overdose of morphia prior to the performance, and he went through Lovborg's part "somnambulistically sick."

#### "A Doll's House"

Following the London premiere of A Doll's House in 1889, the Charringtons performed the play frequently in Australia, New Zealand, India, and Egypt. To a great extent, their success abroad resulted from the controversy they had inspired in London; the indignant reaction of a few foreign officials also added to their infamy. An

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<sup>1</sup>N.B. "A Ghost, a 'Spirited' Sketch, not by Ibsen," which was presented at a matinee benefit for Owen Dove (Criterion Theatre, June 28), was not a satire of Ibsen (see Era, July 2, 1892, p. 6, and Stage, June 3, 1892, p. 12), nor was "The Doll's House," a one-act musical extravaganza, licensed for St. George's Hall in December, either an Ibsen play or a burlesque of his work (see Lord Chamberlain's Plays, 53514, P.).

<sup>2</sup>Letters from Henry James to Florence Bell, October 6 and 7, 1892, in Robins, 1932, pp. 69-71.

Australian actor named Herbert Flemming returned with the Charringtons, but his performance (as Krogstad) was the only one that was unanimously acclaimed in the London revival. The Stage remarked that, as Mrs. Linden, Marion Lea "leaves little to be desired by the remaining devotees of the Ibsen cult," yet the pro-Ibsen reviewer of the P.M.G. found her portrayal intelligent but cold.<sup>1</sup> The Queen's reviewer preferred Robins' tender depiction of Linden, and complained that Lea was ineffective in the reconciliation scene with Krogstad.<sup>2</sup> Most reviewers were disappointed with Charles Fulton's depiction of Dr. Rank, and wished that the part was taken instead by Charrington, who had been a great deal more successful as the consumptive physician in 1889 than as the tyrannical husband in 1892. Janet Achurch generated the greatest amount of comment. Most critics, especially the Ibsenites, lamented the sacrifice of Nora's spontaneity and girlishness to Achurch's development of a consummate acting technique. She was accused of grimacing, attitudinizing, and overacting to mark the effects that she had previously communicated through empathy and charm. While such histrionics might have been necessary in the uncivilized reaches of Australia, they were inforgivable in London. Archer lauded her naturalistic performance in Act I, but he took great exception to her rendering of Act II, especially the tarantella, which he had always regarded as Ibsen's last concession to Sardou-like theatricality.

To the commonplace actress, no doubt, this tarantella is the great attraction of the part, and I am not denying that, according to the old standards, it is ingeniously and

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<sup>1</sup>"The Avenue," Stage, April 2, 1892, p. 2; and "'The Doll's House' at the Avenue," P.M.G., April 20, 1892, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>"Between the Acts," Queen, April 30, 1892, p. 717.

skilfully handled. My point is, that it belongs to an inferior order of dramatic effects....But there is no reason why this one moment of artificiality should be suffered to falsify the tone of the whole act. It is quite possible -- as Miss Achurch herself has shown again -- to live up to the tarantella, instead of acting up to it. No doubt she has lately been accustomed to audiences who demand 'acting,' and felt themselves defrauded if they were put off with mere living instead. But she has now returned to regions of -- shall we say semi-civilization?<sup>1</sup>

Archer also complained that in the final scene of Act III, Achurch no longer produced the illusion of Nora's emergence as a new woman, but instead, "She shows us the old Nora in a resentful, argumentative humour -- I could almost say the ideal Nora of 'the quaint sect who call themselves Anti-Ibsenites.'" Although she still surpassed all other actresses in the scene, the distance between Achurch and her imitators was no longer "immeasurable."<sup>2</sup>

Achurch's new depiction of Nora did appeal to a few anti-Ibsen critics. According to the St. James's Gazette, she returned "a still more finished artist than before. Her method has ripened, her resources are more ample, her voice has gained in power." This seems to suggest a less naturalistic style, "charged with even greater subtlety, abandon, and force" than in 1889.<sup>3</sup> The Era commended Achurch's performance, but insisted (as before) "that A Doll's House is simply a satirical joke played by Ibsen upon his credulous admirers."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "The Theatre," World, April 27, 1892, p. 22. s.a.  
 'Spectator' [A.B. Walkley], "Avenue Theatre," Star, April 20, 1892, p.2;  
 and letter from Shaw to Achurch dated April 21, 1892, in Laurence, 1965,  
 pp. 337-8.

<sup>2</sup>Archer, Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>"'A Doll's House' at the Avenue," St. James's Gazette, April 20, 1892,  
 p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>"The Avenue," Era, April 23, 1893, p. 6.

The play itself was abused by several critics, and some of the old complaints about its logic, its lack of sentimentality, and its impropriety for the stage were reiterated.

Not even the subtlety Miss Achurch brings to bear with such artistic manipulation in developing the myriad fleeting phases of the doll wife's waywardness can make an audience care for Nora Helmer sufficiently to become interested either in her passing conduct or her ultimate fate. The tempting scene with the loathsome Dr. Rank, though evidently acted with far less disagreeable suggestiveness than the dramatist intended, suffices to revolt the ordinary playgoer so far as to kill any sympathy he may have had for a wife capable of making such unchaste overtures.... After that designedly provocative display by Nora Helmer of her stockings to the doctor...morbid curiosity as to what may follow may survive, but no longer wholesome human interest.<sup>1</sup>

Anti-Ibsen critics claimed to be irritated by Ibsen's resurrection and reminded readers that Ibsen was "trumpeted into notoriety" by a noisy coterie more interested in its own advertisement than in Ibsen's, whose plays would never be produced if the criteria of merit was applied.<sup>2</sup> As the People's critic remarked, "Many of us will be glad to see any Ibsen plays that Miss Achurch and Mr. Charrington may give us, but we shall also be glad to see these two players in something else."<sup>3</sup>

Because of the unenthusiastic Ibsenite and non-Ibsenite notices, A Doll's House was not expected to stay on the bills for long. A few critics advised readers to see the production, but it was clearly a disappointment to all who remembered Achurch's first performance. The production was saved, however, because the cast took the criticism seriously, and when Archer returned to the Avenue a few nights after

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<sup>1</sup>"The Theatres. Avenue," People, April 24, 1892, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>'Carados,' "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, April 24, 1892, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>"The Actor," People, April 4, 1892, p. 4.

the opening he noticed that Achurch had rediscovered much of her former naturalness.<sup>1</sup> The houses for the first two performances were very poor, but receipts soon picked up and by April 26 it appeared that A Doll's House might be a financial success.<sup>2</sup> It ran for thirty performances, commencing on April 19 and playing until May 20 (with matinees on April 23 and 30). Forget-me-not was then performed for seven nights, followed by twelve more performances of A Doll's House, May 30 to June 10 (with a matinee June 4). The second series of Ibsen performances was intended as a stop-gap until a new comedy was prepared, but though Charrington sponsored two matinee programmes in June, he relinquished the Avenue lease thereafter. Achurch suffered from bouts of ill health and half the time was replaced by Rose Norreys (May 6-20 and June 2-10), who had represented Nora in 1891. Norreys also acted in the performance at Crystal Palace on May 27, but the rest of the cast remained the same throughout the run.

### "Beata"

Beata, directed by Leonard Outram, commenced a short run at the Globe Theatre on the same day A Doll's House was revived at the Avenue. When the play was published as Rosmer of Rosmersholm in the spring of 1891, there had been confusion about the author's (Austin Fryers) attitudes toward Ibsen. Some confusion remained in 1892, as advance

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<sup>1</sup>Archer, *op cit.*

<sup>2</sup>See "Chit Chat," Stage, April 28, 1892, p. 11; and "Theatrical Notes," P.M.G., April 26, 1892, p. 1.



notices suggested that the Ibsenites would be pleased about the presentation. The production made it clear to most reviewers, however, that the script was an affront to Ibsen and Ibsenites and that it was composed in a semi-satiric vein, with little reverence for Ibsen or the original play.

Fryers made a few changes when he prepared the acting version. Beata portrays the events antecedent to Rosmersholm, but the action is compressed from four acts to three. In the newer version there is an increased amount of emphasis on the childlessness of Beata (Rosmer's wife) and on the cruel manipulation of this woman by her younger rival. The speeches are shorter and more direct, and there are more overt references to the characters and events of Rosmersholm. The order of scenes is altered, but most importantly, the ending is changed so that Rosmersholm is, in fact, made superfluous. In the final scene of Beata, Rebecca declares passionate love to Rosmer, but he is deeply offended by this insult to his hospitality and to his wife. When Beata's suicide is announced, Rosmer declares that he too must take his life, as Beata meant more to him than Rebecca ever could. He welcomes Rebecca's love only if she will share Beata's fate with him; Rebecca refuses, and as Rosmer approaches the mill race she declares: "BEATA HAS HIM STILL!"<sup>1</sup>

The Daily Chronicle and I.S.D.N. agreed that Beata was "a very neat sample of dramatic workmanship," but the I.S.D.N. also expressed the widely held view that "it is difficult to see that any good purpose

either artistic or practical has been effected by the production."<sup>2</sup> It attracted attention principally because of its association with Ibsen. The acting was excellent, and some reviewers even thought that the play was fairly good, but while Beata's farewell moved several critics to tears, the final scene was abhorred, and few critics believed that a couple of effective moments justified the presentation of the entire play. "I should have gone to my grave thinking 'Rosmersholm' as bad as bad can be if I had never seen 'Beata,'" wrote 'Carados' in the Referee, while the critic for the Evening News and Post found "the clear proof that Ibsen's subjects owe their interest to masterly treatment rather than to inherent novelty or audacity of concept."<sup>3</sup> Ibsen was actually defended by the press that had once attacked him so vigorously. Several critics acknowledged Ibsen's skill in the light of this 'rival':

Whatever may be thought of Ibsen as a playwright, he is everywhere acknowledged as a man of genius; and where he has failed to convince, others, who cannot hope to be so described, should hardly venture to make the experiment. Objectionable, depressing, unnatural as 'Rosmersholm' was, the relative value of 'Beata' and the real Ibsen play is very much that of electro-plates and real silver.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of writing a play based on events anterior to the action of a masterpiece was not admired -- nor was Fryers' attempt to turn Ibsen into domestic drama, no matter how well the tendency to caricature was suppressed.

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<sup>1</sup>Lord Chamberlain's Plays, Number 53496, lic. 84.

<sup>2</sup>"Globe Theatre," Daily Chronicle, April 20, 1892, p. 6; and "Beata," I.S.D.N., April 23, 1892, p. 203.

<sup>3</sup>"Carados," "Dramatic and Musical Gossip," Referee, April 24, 1892, p.2;

"The Theatres. Ibsen Neat and Ibsen Diluted -- at the Avenue and the Globe," Evening News and Post, April 20, 1892, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>"Between the Acts," Queen, April 3, 1892, p. 717.

The audience at the first (matinee) performance was small but polite, and the play, the actors, and the author were warmly applauded by an assembly that, evidently, contained very few ardent Ibsenites:

The admirers of Dr. Ibsen, we believe, regard the attempt to construct a sort of prologue in four acts to 'Rosmersholm' ...as somewhat of a liberty; and such of them as were present yesterday afternoon at the first performance of 'Beata'...were probably not reconciled to this rather unceremonious proceeding ....These, however, were evidently a minority. The bulk of the spectators came manifestly in a more friendly mood, for they applauded vigorously the efforts of the actors.<sup>1</sup>

Beata was performed on the afternoons of April 19-23, then moved into the evening bill on April 24, where it remained (with matinees on April 30 and May 7) until May 11. There were twenty three performances in all, for according to the I.S.D.N., a 'professional matinee' was held on May 18.<sup>2</sup> On the 8th of May, a small group assembled to hear Austin Fryers speak about Ibsen at the Playgoers' Club. His assertion that all Ibsen's plays were "unholy in suggestion" inspired a vigorous discussion, and Edward Aveling accused him of lauding Beata. Presumably, Eleanor Marx Aveling's speech concurred with her husband's,

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<sup>1</sup>"The Drama. 'Rosmersholm' Re-written," Daily News, April 20, 1892, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Beata suddenly dried up at the Globe toward the end of last week, and believers in the Ibsenite movement cannot have been much cheered by its fate. Mr. F. Langley [the lessee] closed his theatre pending the preparation of another venture, but reopened its doors for a 'professional matinee' of Beata on Tuesday. As the play was already dead those professionals present on this occasion must have felt themselves in the position of a coroner's jury at an inquest. What their inward verdict was it would be very interesting to know." (I.S.D.N., May 21, 1892, p. 368).

and Fryers "in reply discharged all his ordnance, great and small, at the Avelings, and assured the lady that men were superior to women, and he to her."<sup>1</sup>

### Publications and Other Projects

In early 1892, Philip Wicksteed's Chelsea Town Hall discourses were published as Four Lectures on Henrik Ibsen, Dealing Mainly with his Metrical Works (c.f. Chapter One). A milestone was reached in the summer, when the Archer's full length prose translation of Peer Gynt appeared under Walter Scott's imprint. Charles Archer wrote that "in spite of the enormous loss of power and beauty entailed by the sacrifice of the rhymes and by other shortcomings, its appearance probably did more than any other stroke in the Ibsen campaign to dispel the grotesque anti-Ibsenite vision of the poet as a prosaic and humourless hot-gospeller," but its impact beyond literary circles was probably negligible. Arthur Quiller-Couch and William Archer exchanged a volley of letters in the Speaker, nit-picking over details of

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<sup>1</sup>'Sir Peter,' "Stage Whispers," Players, May 13, 1892, p. 28.

interpretation, and a few reviews appeared in the better journals, but there was virtually no hope of an English production of Peer Gynt before the next century.<sup>1</sup>

While it took twenty five years to produce an English edition of Peer Gynt, Ibsen's latest play was assured almost instantaneous translation. Ibsenites awaited the appearance of the new play as impatiently as in the autumn of 1890 -- or perhaps even more so -- and there were many more of them to draw attention to the event. Robins' list of people who climbed the steps to her apartment in search of "news from Norway" reads like an abridged Who's Who of London society.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Archer, 1931, p. 179. s.a. items in the Bookman: Arthur Quiller-Couch, "A Literary Causerie," October 8, pp. 443-4, and October 22, pp. 502-3; and William Archer, "An Open Letter," October 15, pp. 463-4. The translation was reviewed by C.H. Herford, "Peer Gynt," Bookman, December 1892, pp. 85-6; and in the Athenaeum, July 1, 1893, p. 41. The English premiere of the Peer Gynt took place in 1911. See J.H. McCarthy, "Peer Gynt," Gentlemen's Magazine, November 1892, p. 533, on the unlikelihood of a production of the play.

<sup>2</sup>See Robins, 1932, pp. 77-6. Enthusiasm was shared by Robins, Henry James, Shaw, Archer, Gosse, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symonds, Oswald Crawford, and Hubert Crackenthorpe, but Robins' list also includes an assortment of eminent artists, politicians, and intellectuals not actively associated with Ibsenism (except, in some cases, for their attendance at performances). There was Frances Johnson (Mrs. Cashel Hoey, a novelist, and Agent General for Victoria); Sidney Colvin (Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, a frequent contributor to periodicals, and editor of Robert Louis Stevenson's work); Stephen Coleridge (artist, author, and clerk of the Assizes Circuit in South Wales); Lucy (Mrs. William Kingdom) Clifford (novelist and playwright); the Hon. Mrs. Norman Grosvenor (novelist, chairperson of the Women's Farm and Garden Association, and founder of the Colonial Intelligence League for Educated Women); Mary Arnold (Mrs. Humphry Ward, author of Robert Elsmere and other novels); W.T. Stead (eccentric radical journalist, editor of the Review of Reviews and the P.M.G.); Rhoda Broughton (novelist); Felix Moscheles (artist, Esperanto Club president, and active pamphleteer, propagandist, and lecturer) and his wife (a friend of Shaw's); Genevieve Ward (the actress who played Lona Hessel in 1889); Mr. Crackenthorpe (an eminent barrister) and his wife; Mortimer Menpes (painter, etcher, raconteur, and rifle-shot); J.M. Horsbrugh (Registrar, London University) William Moore

Ibsen, as usual, was entirely secretive about his new work, and would not commit himself to any one publisher. Heinemann was so anxious to obtain the rights that he went to Norway in search of the elusive author, and though he did not obtain an audience with Ibsen, he spoke with his son, Sigurd. Heinemann's edition of Hedda Gabler outsold Walter Scott's, and Sigurd easily convinced his father that Heinemann should be granted permission to publish the new play -- whatever it may be like. It was imperative that an English edition be published as soon as possible so that the copyright could be filed concurrently in Copenhagen and London. Heinemann arranged privately that Elizabeth Robins and Florence Bell would translate, but in Robins' words, this "stirred passion to such a pitch, that in deference to the peace of the publisher, we voluntarily abandoned what we could have exacted -- abandoned it, that is, so far as any public knowledge of our share was concerned."<sup>4</sup> Frederick Hegel, the Danish publisher, posted three copies of each galley proof as they came off his press -- these small bundles were eagerly received from November 8 by Heinemann, Archer, and Robins. By mid-November, Archer and Gosse were hastily preparing a translation without having read the entire script and even without knowing the play's name.

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 (Classical Master in Philology); Gertrude Bell (historian, traveller, and archaeologist), her father Sir Hugh Bell (a businessman) and grandfather Sir Lowthian Bell (industrialist and landowner); the Webbs' friend and neighbour Alice (Mrs. John Richard) Green, nee Stopford (later a member of the Irish Senate); Richard Burdon Haldane (statesman, lawyer, philosopher, and radical Liberal M.P.); Lady Welby and Lady Arabella Romilly; Sir Frederick Pollock (a great legal writer), his wife Georgina, and possibly his mother Juliet (a friend of Macready); Mr. Cock, Q.C., and his wife; and the Hon. Maude Alatheia (Lyulph) Stanley (founder of clubs for working girls).

<sup>4</sup>Robins, 1932, p. 76.

Archer's heart sank when he saw page after page of seemingly endless duologue between Solness and Hilde, but by December 12, when the P.M.G. published his lengthy article, "Henrik Ibsen's New Play," Archer was again enthusiastic. The meaning of The Master Builder (as the play was finally known) was unclear to him but he admired the play and believed it was worthy. It seems that he looked forward to publication, and to the inevitable response:

'Bygmester Solness' is distinctly calculated to please both the Ibsenite and the anti-Ibsenite faction -- to please, but by no means to reconcile. The Ibsenite will find it enthrallingly Ibsenish, full to overflowing of those peculiar qualities (the profane may call them mannerisms) which have fascinated him in the poet's earlier works....To the anti-Ibsenite, on the other hand, 'Bygmester Solness' will be a pure joy. He will chuckle and gloat over it; he will ask, like M. Sarcey, whether any mortal man can understand a 'traître mot' of it; and as it contains frequent allusions to villa building-lots, he will find in it a conclusive proof of the 'suburban' nature of Ibsen's genius.<sup>1</sup>

Robins was also disappointed by the early proofs, but this was partly because she did not envision herself as Hilde; by early December she was keen to play the role.<sup>2</sup>

A limited edition of twelve copies of the Danish text of The Master Builder was printed by Heinemann on December 6, 1892, and to further safeguard his copyright a reading (in Danish) was given at the Haymarket the following morning.<sup>3</sup> R.L. Braekstad read the part of Solness, with his wife as Kaia Fosli, Amy Haldane as Aline,

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "Henrik Ibsen's New Play," P.M.G., December 12, 1892, p. 1. In this anticipatory article, Archer also tells the story of the play and makes a few remarks on its poeticism and imaginative qualities.

<sup>2</sup>See Robins, 1932, pp. 80-4.

<sup>3</sup>Bredsdorff, 1960, p. 48.

Edmund Gosse as Herdal, William Heinemann and Malcolm Salaman as Knut and Ragnar Brovik, and Robins herself as Hilde Wangel.<sup>1</sup> They read to an audience of four and, as Gosse later wrote, "It was odd to think that all this could go on in the very heart of London, where everybody thirsts for something new, and yet totally escape the newspapers."<sup>2</sup>

Readers of the New Review received an early taste of the play when a translation of part of Act II (the scene where Solness tells Hilde about his married life) was included in the January number.<sup>3</sup> Heinemann's large paper edition (costing 21s.) and the quarto edition with a portrait of Ibsen (5s.) sold hundreds of copies soon after their appearance on February 16. The one shilling edition, which was published in mid-June, had an added prologue by Gosse and an epilogue on "The Melody of The Master Builder," in which Archer refuted Walkley's argument that the play was not suitable for the live theatre.<sup>4</sup> The printed text would have inspired a lot more comment than it did had the English stage premiere not taken place almost simultaneously with the publication of the text. Thus, at the Trafalgar Square Theatre, on February 20, 1893, questions about the play's vagueness and absurdity, its meaning and the characters' sanity, and whether or not symbolism had any place in a playhouse were empirically tested.

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<sup>1</sup>Only twelve copies of the playbill were produced; one of these is reproduced in Bredsdorff, 1960.

<sup>2</sup>Charteris, 1931, pp. 226-7.

<sup>3</sup>New Review, January 1893, pp. 32-9.

<sup>4</sup>c.f. A.B. Walkley, "Some Plays of the Day," Fortnightly Review, April 1893, pp. 468-743.



1893: Producing "The Master Builder"

Fortunately for the play, the best possible cast was assembled and loving care was lavished by the actors, translators, and their associates. But such conditions were not guaranteed, and in December 1892 they seemed decidedly unlikely.

Soon after the entire text was available, Robins sought an actor-manager to produce what she, by that time, felt to be 'her play': "One manager after another had been offered the chance to godfather the new Ibsen. In my conviction that one of the established theatres should, and would, give 'The Master Builder' a production worthy of it, I had found myself mistaken."<sup>1</sup> She went round to the theatres where she had had engagements, but the play was judged unintelligible, obscure, dull, mad, and financially risky.<sup>2</sup> In mid-December, an unexpected sponsor was found in Herbert Beerbohm Tree, who had previously toyed with the idea of performing Oswald in Ghosts and who had permitted Mrs. Erving Winslow to read An Enemy of the People in his theatre in 1890. He demanded, however, a few "amazing alterations" (including the Anglicizing of the characters and changing Solness from a builder to a sculptor) and his assistance was politely refused.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Lowenfeldt of the Lyric Theatre also expressed interest, but no arrangement was struck.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robins, 1932, p. 86. s.a. 'A.C.,' "Miss Robins and The Master Builder. A Conversation Reported," Speaker, February 18, 1893, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup>Robins, 1928, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup>Robins, 1932, pp. 89-90.

Instead of teaming up with an actor-manager, Robins chose her leading man, Herbert Waring, and decided to rent a theatre for a week of matinee performances. By January 20, they had financial backing and had undertaken to stage the play themselves. Archer thought that The Master Builder stood the best chance in this sort of arrangement; in Germany and Scandinavia, where Ibsen's plays were acted in state or ordinary commercial theatres, the stock companies took them as part of their ordinary line of business, and individual actors had little or nothing at stake. "This [system] was all very well for the earlier plays, down to, say, An Enemy of the People; but the later plays demand not only extraordinary intelligence, but extraordinary goodwill on the part of their interpreters. This is what they meet with in England."<sup>1</sup>

Within a month, The Master Builder was before the public. Certain economies were adopted -- there does not seem, for example, to have been a crowd of townspeople to witness Solness' fall -- but infinite care was taken over many details of interpretation, performance, and

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "The Symbolism of 'The Master Builder,'" Black and White, February 18, 1893, p. 210.

staging.<sup>1</sup> Even the cut of Hilde's collar was debated and researched until perfection was attained.<sup>2</sup> This did not allay Archer's fears, as he was expert in the foibles of his contemporaries' judgment:

When I learned that Miss Elizabeth Robins intended to produce it, I almost besought her to hold her hand. I told her that she was courting certain disaster, and a disaster which would affect not only her own fortunes, but those of the entire progressive movement....Nora and Hedda, I am convinced, do not really bore anyone of average intelligence. They affect many people more or less unpleasantly, and this unpleasant sensation they describe...as boredom, whereas in reality it is something entirely different. But 'The Master Builder,' I feared, would really and seriously bore as well as bewilder the average audience....and as the progressive movement is, in my conception, nothing but a campaign against boredom in the theatre, I would fain, had it been in my power, have kept the play off the stage altogether.<sup>3</sup>

Archer's prediction was correct -- audiences did find the play boring and extremely perplexing. For some, like Henry Hyndman, the play was redeemed somewhat by the acting: "The Master Builder went near to be the death of me. If it had not been for Miss Robins's marvellous display of bright and intelligent acting, my wife would have had to call in four stalwart scene-shifters to carry me out."<sup>4</sup> Few were as

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<sup>1</sup>"Standing guard over Ibsen's interests, at every rehearsal, note-book in hand, a kind of Recording Angel setting down our sins of omission or commission, was William Archer. Nothing escaped him, from the slightest inflection of voice...nothing." He gave the cast meticulous notes, which were respectfully and gratefully received. "The dress rehearsals of all Ibsen plays I was concerned in producing," wrote Robins, "brought round us the inner circle of Ibsen supporters, and a few of those who in our opinion ought to be supporters. These select but agitating parties often gave the unprofessional critic a chance to help us." (Robins, 1928, pp. 42, 43-4.)

<sup>2</sup>Robins, 1928, pp. 44-5. s.a. Robins, 1932, pp. 97-9.

<sup>3</sup>William Archer, "Ibsen's 'Master Builder,'" I.L.N., February 25, 1893, p. 237, rpt. in The Theatrical 'World' for 1893 (London: Walter Scott, 1894), p. 64-5.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Mayers Hyndman, Further Reminiscences (London: Macmillan, 1912), p. 220.

patient as George Moore, who, on his second and third visits found the play 'growing on him.'<sup>1</sup> And even fewer were willing (or able?) to puzzle the play out for themselves, and dismissed it as a morally unwholesome collection of indecipherable symbolism, enacted by lunatics. Others gave Ibsen the benefit of the doubt and described the play as an allegory -- but of what they seldom guessed.

Difficult it may be to understand exactly what the author desires to convey; but that beneath the surface there lies a distinct and pregnant meaning one is irresistibly forced to conclude. And the very fact that it is well-nigh impossible to arrive at any satisfactory solution of the riddle seems, in a manner, almost to add to its fascination. A piece of fantasy, an allegory, a fable, the play unquestionably is; inconclusive, vague, obscure; outraging at every turn the laws that rightly and necessarily govern dramatic construction; yet, curiously enough, offering ample matter for thought and reflection and stimulating the imagination to a high degree.<sup>2</sup>

It is significant that most reviewers took enough interest in The Master Builder to want to understand Ibsen's point and to insist on clarification from 'the Elect.' Playgoers and critics besought Ibsenites for clues to the play, but they were noncommittal, or at best contradictory. Walkley, supposedly of the 'inner circle' of Ibsenites, suffered as much as the rest:

In my despair I appealed for enlightenment to my neighbour [Gosse] in the Trafalgar Square stalls at the first performance of the play...he declared, without a blush, that after some months of study the meaning of the play had gradually soaked into his mind. But when I begged him to communicate that meaning he only stammered, and said this was a very rainy February.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Robins, 1932, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup>"The Latest Ibsen Play. 'The Master Builder,'" St. James's Gazette, February 21, 1893, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>"Mainly About People," Star, February 21, 1893, p. 1.

Ibsen's hither to eager explicators were silent, and everyone was confused.

Originally, Robins and Waring planned to perform The Master Builder at five matinees (February 20-24). Critics reported antithetical audience responses, but Robins found the spectators sympathetic and engaged in the action.

...there was in the air (any actor will understand) that unmistakable response -- and I do not mean applause -- a response no less to the 'little devil' in Hilda than to her thrilling sense of the adventure of living; a response to that queer mixture of wildness and tenderness, that determination to have her own imperious way, crossed by the necessity to feel what other people were feeling. Ah, that made it very difficult for Hilda to be only the wild bird of prey -- made it impossible.<sup>1</sup>

'Michael Field,' who attended three performances, was intrigued by Hilda's demonic modernity and the final image: "she snatches a white shawl and waves, waves! I shall always see her in my mind waving -- blue and white, invincible, alive, vivifying shirt and shawl."<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Burne-Jones, too, was mesmerized by this sequence: "when I got up to go, I was bewildered to find the theatre empty; I never knew how long I'd been sitting there alone."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robins, 1928, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Field Diaries, February 24, 1893. BL Add. MS 46781, vol. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Robins, 1928, p. 50.

The audiences were fairly large; eighty pounds were taken on the first afternoon and at<sup>at</sup> least two performances the theatre was full.<sup>1</sup> The spectators were well behaved; the only serious breaches of decorum were outbreaks of mirth at, for example, the mention of Aline Solness' "nine lovely dolls" and on Hilda's line "What is all this nonsense you are talking?" Although non-Ibsenites were nonplussed, the audience at the first performance, at least, was interested and attentive throughout and recalled the actors twice at the conclusion. An additional five matinees were given the following week, though no material profit was made.

The sad thing is that -- il parâit -- neither she [Robins] nor Waring have as yet touched a penny of money. When Heinemann, and the salaries and all the expenses, theatre-rent, staff, 2 managers, &c., &c. are paid, there is nothing for those 2 unhappy 5th wheels to the coach! It is very wretched....As for the no-money element, she didn't at any rate renounce money to do it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Edward R. Russell and Percy Cross Standing, Ibsen on his Merits (London: Chapman and Hall, 1897), p. 112. The premiere attracted quite a few stage stars: Julia Neilson, Fred Terry, Forbes Robertson ("Mainly About People," Star, February 21, 1893, p. 1), Beerbohm Tree, William Kendal, A.W. and Myra (Holme) Pinero, Kate Bateman, Eva Moore, Annie Rose, Kate Bealby ("Plays and Players," Globe, February 23, 1893, p. 6), with Ellen Terry attending a few days later ("Vaudeville Theatre," Daily Chronicle, March 7, 1893, p. 5; and "Chit Chat," Stage, March 9, 1893, p. 11). Florence Heniker (Meyer, 1971), Thomas Hardy (Florence Emily Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 2, London: Macmillan, 1965, p. 307) also attended, and Oscar and Constance Wilde (Michael Field Diaries, March 25, 1891, BL Add. MS 46781, vol. 6). On March 4, Henry James wrote to Florence Bell: "The house yesterday was full -- the best (but one) they have had." (Robins, 1932, p. 103.)

<sup>2</sup>Robins, 1932, p. 103.

From March 6 until March 26, the play was seen at the Vaudeville in evening performances and Saturday matinees. It did not appeal to the general theatre-goer, and its longevity of twenty one performances over and above the ten at the Trafalgar Square Theatre attests to Robins' dedication to Ibsen and the joy she experienced in performing the play. As Henry James prophesied, "if the public should ever completely renounce [Ibsen], players enamoured of their art will still be found ready to interpret him for that art's sake to empty benches."<sup>1</sup> Although spectators at the first evening performance were not too numerous, but they reacted to the play in a way similar to the matinee-goers. By March 18, however, the I.S.D.N. declared that "the scene of desolation inside [the Vaudeville] is melancholy in the extreme. Here and there a few misguided creatures scattered in pit and circle sit and suffer, and wonder what it is all about, and no one on earth can tell them."<sup>2</sup> On April 1, the I.S.D.N. noted that William Heinemann "intends to bring an action against some critic who said there was not £20 in the house at the Vaudeville when The Master Builder was being played." No such suit was ever filed, but the commentator delighted in continuing this jab at Ibsen:

I can tell Mr. Heinemann what the rumour was among theatrical people as to the melancholy attempt to run such a piece as The Master Builder at the Vaudeville....the statement is that Messrs. Gatti, anxious to avoid closing their theatre let it to the people who wanted to play the Ibsen piece on these terms: Mr. Gatti's men were to take the money at the doors,

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<sup>1</sup>Henry James, "On the Occasion of The Master Builder," P.M.G., February 17, 1893, rpt. The Scenic Art (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949), p. 258.

<sup>2</sup>"Circular Notes," I.S.D.N., March 18, 1893, p. 39.

to deduct the rent of the theatre, and to hand over the balance to the temporary managers; and the rumour goes on to allege that there never was any balance to hand.<sup>1</sup>

At the final reckoning, Robins had not made any money from the venture, but she had not lost any either. Her reputation as a fine actress was cemented: perhaps the ultimate irony was that the Times theatre listings advertised the play on the merits of Robins' performance -- with a quote from the Daily Telegraph! The London company performed the play to a large and sympathetic audience at the Theatre Royal, Brighton, on March 30, and took away a profit of £57 11s 9d.<sup>2</sup> Even in the provinces The Master Builder was hailed as a great (though vague) play, and the acting was commended. Later in the season, Robins gave a few more performances of the newest plays as part of an Ibsen subscription series. Altogether, the 1893 season was a busy one for Ibsenites -- busier and more adventurous too than in 1891.

#### 1893: A Modernist Season

The Independent Theatre Society's third programme featured works by George Moore (The Strike at Arlingford), Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins (Alan's Wife), Josine Holland (Leida), 'Michael Field' (A Question of Memory), and John Todhunter (The Black Cat). Strains of Ibsen's influence are noticeable in all of these plays, but it is the

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<sup>1</sup>"Circular Notes," I.S.D.N., April 1, 1893, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>Fales Library. Gosse's "Bibliographic Note" to the June edition of The Master Builder suggests that the play ran in Brighton after the conclusion of the London engagement. It does seem, however, that this "run" was limited to one performance. See Brighton Gazette and Sussex Evening Telegraph, Sussex Daily News, and The Argus, March 29-April 5.



Society's first production of the season that is important here. Ghosts was performed before a packed house at the Athenaeum, Tottenham Court Road, on January 26.<sup>1</sup> Alice Wright (not Stella Campbell or Miss Hall Caine, whose names were given by Franc and Hollander)<sup>2</sup> repeated her coup as the long-suffering wife and mother, with Leonard Outram and Lewis Waller supporting.

Even though one might think that one performance of 'Ghosts' was quite enough to last a lifetime, there was temptation to witness again the quite admirable impersonations....It was so crowded that many persons had to stand throughout the entire performance, and the occasion had been found so seductive that one noted here a famous artist in design, there a popular lady novelist, here a light of the operatic world, and nearly everywhere the familiar face of an actor or actress.....the whole symposium was voted a success. This, mainly, was because Ibsen, intelligently interpreted, exercised his old power over the highly appreciative audience.<sup>3</sup>

The Weekly Sun printed a piece denouncing Mrs. Alving's conduct and Ibsen's judgment of it, quoting no less an authority on sin than Cardinal Newman, and concluding that Oswald's imbecility is not only attributable to his paternal legacy. Ibsen's reputation was defended the following week in a letter by George Turner:

Ibsen has succeeded in raising serious doubt in many minds whether what may be called the theological enforcement of unswerving and one-sided faithfulness can be reasonably justified. Perhaps this doubt ought to have been suggested in a more artistic manner, but if it were done more pleasantly the absence of a shock would possibly lessen the likelihood of it being accomplished so thoroughly. And surely your contributor does think that the problem which Ibsen has stated, and solved in the stance of the 'Doll's House,' is one worthy of earnest consideration. There may

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<sup>1</sup>Originally billed for the Bijou Theatre, Bedford Street.

<sup>2</sup>See Franc, 1919, Appendix A, and Lee M. Hollander (intro.), Speeches and New Letters of Ibsen, trans. Arne Kildal (London: Frank Palmer, 1911), p. 153.

<sup>3</sup>"'Ghosts' Again," Globe, January 27, 1893, p. 3.

not be any fig-[1]leaves in Ibsen country, and of this we need not be sorry when the general accompaniment of fig-leaves is tin clothing on some of the most beautiful existing statuary....

Ibsen believes that individuals should be treated as ends in themselves and not as means to other persons' ends....If Ibsen has done nothing more than to state this problem in a new form, if he has but succeeded in attracting the attention of thoughtful persons to the seriousness of the questions involved, we can forgive him for not having been sufficiently reserved in the matter of his gospel, and for not having been quite aesthetic in the manner of preaching that gospel.<sup>1</sup>

Other than this, the production attracted little adverse comment, and it was certainly judged an artistic success.

By the time Achurch and Charrington got around to reviving A Doll's House for fourteen performances (March 11-25), the evening run of The Master Builder was underway. Charrington's houses were good and the response was very enthusiastic. As far as the critics were concerned, Achurch had rediscovered her former charm, and there was only praise for her performance. The 'frequent revival' of this play did not fail to be noticed by the Ibsenite critics. The Globe's reviewer exaggerated when he wrote that because two of Ibsen's plays were simultaneously attracting paying houses, it proved that Ibsen was commercially viable.<sup>2</sup> Archer, realistic as ever, noted that "it is true that both A Doll's House...and The Master Builder...are serving, more or less, as stopgaps; but managers do not even stop gaps with

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<sup>1</sup>"Music and the Drama," Letter to the Weekly Sun, February 5, 1893, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>"Plays and Players," Globe, March 16, 1893, p. 6.

plays in which there is no attraction, which 'the public will not have at any price.'<sup>1</sup> Charrington also promised The Lady from the Sea, Rosmersholm, and part of Brand, but the promise was unfulfilled.<sup>2</sup>

In mid-April, Jacob Grein and Sir Frederick Pollock headed a committee to organize a series of subscription performances of Ibsen plays. The leading actors were none other than Elizabeth Robins and Lewis Waller. At least a hundred persons were required to subscribe five pound guarantees -- not a small sum considering that in its first year the I.T.S. promised five plays for £2 10s -- but the capital was easily raised. Early subscribers included Sir A. Lyall, Margot Tennant, Herbert Asquith (then Home Secretary), Mrs. Burne-Jones, Mr. Crackenthorpe, Q.C., R.B. Haldane, and Sir Horace Davey. Hedda Gabler, Rosmersholm, and The Master Builder (together with Act IV of Brand) were performed four times each between May 29 and June 10: twice as matinees, then twice in the evening. A substantial amount of the receipts came from the doors and box office (£179 11s 6d, compared to £514 14s 6d in subscriptions), and a profit of £67 3s was divided between Robins and the subscribers. Robins's and Wallers' regular salaries were £50 each, considerably greater than the other performers'; Heinemann's share was £20, whereas Ibsen's remuneration amounted to

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, World, March 15, 1893, rpt. Archer, 1894, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup>The Lady from the Sea was not performed. Franc seems to have been deceived by the announcements but not to have checked the facts.

only £12 10s.<sup>1</sup> In the summer, Archer urged Robins and Lea to tour Hedda Gabler; although the most important university cities were considered good risks, not even a limited tour took place.<sup>2</sup>

On September 9, Rosmersholm was welcomed again by Brighton audiences in a benefit performance with Louis Calvert and May Harvey.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, however, Ibsen's influence was measured in the West End when The Second Mrs. Tanqueray premiered at the St. James's. The 'Captious Critic' of the I.S.D.N. summarized the situation when he depicted a pleased, self-satisfied looking Pinero resting a hand on Ibsen's shoulder and saying "I think we have something now that will suit you."<sup>4</sup>

Pinero's indirect debt to Ibsen was freely acknowledged: plays like Hedda Gabler and Rosmersholm had fostered an interest in serious drama -- 'problem plays' as the British variety was known -- and had prompted the public to require just a bit more of an evening out. George Alexander was fortunate to have found Stella Campbell for Paula, but his original choice was Elizabeth Robins.<sup>5</sup> The Second Mrs. Tanqueray was swiftly (and perhaps prematurely) heralded as a turning point in British drama and the finest play of the period. Pinero

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<sup>1</sup>These figures are from financial accounts in the Fales Library.

<sup>2</sup>Lea wrote to Robins: "WA's letter is very interesting. We ought to begin with 3 dates -- Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh -- no more for a start -- we wd. make money without a doubt I believe and could lose none there whereas elsewhere its unsure." (Fales Library)

<sup>3</sup>See "Theatre Royal: Brighton," The Argus, September 9, 1893, p. 2; and "Entertainments. 'Rosmersholm' at the Theatre," Brighton Gazette and Sussex Telegraph, September 9, 1893, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup>I.S.D.N., June 10, 1893, p. 522.

<sup>5</sup>Alan Dent, Mrs. Patrick Campbell (London: Museum Press, 1961), pp. 55-7. s.a. John Dawish, "The 'First' Mrs. Tanqueray," Theatre Quarterly, no. 35 (1979), pp. 77-93.

certainly satisfied everyone that he was a master of construction and artistic in every desirable way. As far as the Ibsenites were concerned, a new epoch in English drama was more than welcome, and if Ibsen could be dispensed with sooner rather than later (British playwrights having learned what they should from him) that was perfectly all right with Archer and his colleagues. "There is one point on which I cordially agree with the rabidest Anti-Ibsenite," he wrote, "and that is that we have had too much of Ibsen."<sup>1</sup> It did not escape his notice that Mrs. Tanqueray's premiere preceded the start of the Opera Comique subscription series by only two days. Three days before that (and four years almost to the day since the Novelty premiere) a foreign production of A Doll's House was presented. Eleanora Duse had brought Nora to the West End.

#### A Southern "Doll's House"

Many critics still maintained that it was impossible to reconcile the two halves of Mrs. Helmer (the frivolous child-wife and the emancipated woman) and that any attempt to join them was doomed to failure. Nevertheless, they were keen to witness Duse's interpretation. Unlike the chauvinistically favoured Achurch, Duse was prone to underplaying, and disappointed Archer by missing certain points evidently characteristic of previous interpreters.

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "'Mrs. Tanqueray' -- and After," St. James's Gazette, June 3, 1893, rpt. Archer, 1894, p. 143.

In her dread of becoming melodramatic, the Italian actress neglects to be legitimately dramatic, and omits or slurs effects which the poet evidently intended. For example, she declines to give the slightest start when Krogstad points out the remarkable circumstance that her father endorsed her note of hand 'three days after his death.' Now this is mere pedantry. Up to that moment Nora has been quite unconscious of her blunder; she could not but give some sign of surprise on being confronted with it. Again, Helmer's use of the word 'crime' produces no special effect upon her, and she does nothing to bring out the tragic irony which she feels in his remark, 'It gives me a positive sense of physical discomfort to come in contact with such people.'<sup>1</sup>

Archer regretted most of Duse's cuts, including the nurse's scene, portions of the 'stockings scene,' and her intimations that she may commit suicide. The one cut that Archer did approve of was precisely what his colleagues in the critical stalls were most looking forward to: the tarantella. Here, Duse "dons the crown of roses, seizes the tambourine, makes one sweep round the stage, then drops powerless with emotion and fear in a chair."<sup>2</sup> This, Archer felt, was preferable to the frenetic, metaphorical depiction of Nora's psychological state that he abhorred in the script; some melodramatic vestiges were desirable, but not the most obvious one.

Other critics deplored Duse's abridgement, and suddenly a whole host of Ibsen experts arose to defend A Doll's House against such unfortunate expurgations. This passage from Truth provides an interesting example of the phenomenon:

It is no mere accident that causes her to substitute for Mrs. Helmer's frenzied dance of despair two or three self-possessed steps which would hardly be out of place in a minuet. She simply misunderstands, or, if she understands, she deliberately ignores, the morbid element in the woman's

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "'A Doll's House' -- 'A Scrap of Paper,'" World, June 14, 1893, rpt. Archer, 1894, pp. 158-9.

<sup>2</sup>"Lyric Theatre. Ibsen in Italian," Daily Graphic, June 10, 1893, p. 7.

moods, the unhealthy excitement in her gaiety, and the hysteria in her passion. She treats the play in perfectly straightforward fashion, not as a psychological study, but as a domestic drama; and little as I care for Ibsen's psychology, I care for his domestic drama even less.<sup>1</sup>

The Times critic seemed to regard Duse's depiction of a woman beginning to reach enlightenment but not yet possessed of it almost as a violation of Ibsen's didactic point, or at any rate of the point he was believed to have been making.

With a Nora of this unreflecting and hot-headed description any ending of the play is possible....in ten minutes, when she has had time for a change of mood, nobody would be surprised to hear her returning cab-wheels outside. Unquestionably Madame Duse's interpretation deprives Nora of many of her enigmatical attributes, Mr. Ibsen's heroine becoming in her hands a shallow, flighty, morbid, neuropathic creature, upon whose course of conduct it is impossible to reckon, and whose actions are the outcome, not of thought, but of a mere feather-headed instability of character.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, individual critics' idea of what Nora should be were coloured by their prejudices regarding playmaking and character motivation, as well as by their habitual practice of regarding Achurch's depiction of Nora as the right one. Non-Ibsenite critics, failing to recognize Ibsen's universality and accustomed to complaining about his 'hot-gospeiling,' little valued Duse's quieter, more humane, apolitical interpretation.

...when she comes in at the last, clad in the simple, ugly red dress of every-day life...it was easy to see, in the flashing eye and the voice which had got in its tones the quality of command, not, perhaps, the Nora of Ibsen, or the self-assertive ideal of the 'shrieking sisterhood,' but, at least, a strong, self-centred valiant woman. The whole of the last scene was finely played, as though La Duse rejoiced

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<sup>1</sup>"An Empty Doll's House," Truth, June 15, 1893, p. 1311.

<sup>2</sup>"The Theatres -- Lyric," Times, June 12, 1893, p. 4.

in her emancipation -- not, indeed, from the thralldom of her sex, but from the narrow and unreal inanities of Norwegian petulance and parochialism.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, while some thought that the role was unworthy of its interpreter, others judged it her greatest creation.

Sometimes the supporting players appeared too unlike the English idea of the Norwegian bourgeoisie. Helmer (Flavio Ando) was variously described as "a gentleman from Saffron Hill without the organ," who looked like a Jewish artisan or who was made up "like a New England Shaker" with a goatee. Krogstad (Effore Mazzanti) "was more like a bandit in mufti than an ex-bank clerk," or a thinly disguised Sicilian bandit without the operatic costume.<sup>2</sup> They too, however, had their champions.

### "An Enemy of the People"

Although Ibsen never visited England, his notorious Swedish counterpart was welcomed by the I.T.S.'s supporters when he paid a brief visit to London in mid-June.<sup>3</sup> August Strindberg's plays were becoming known through occasional articles and paragraphs in English magazines, but English translations were as yet nonexistent. Interest in The Father, and particularly Miss Julie, spread from Scandinavia and France to Britain, but as was the case with Ibsen, more than a decade

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<sup>1</sup>"Lyric Theatre," Daily Telegraph, June 10, 1893, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>"Lyric Theatre," I.S.D.N., June 17, 1893, p.562; A.B. Walkley, "The Drama," Speaker, June 17, 1893, p. 685; and 'Spectator' [A.B. Walkley],

"Lyric Theatre. Signora Duse as Nora," Star, June 10, 1893, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>"Theatrical Notes," P.M.G., June 20, 1893, p. 4.



passed before productions ensued. Even then it was stage clubs and peripheral artists that took up his cause, invariably in out-of-the-way venues, and he was not properly recognized until the inter-war period.<sup>1</sup>

Only four years after Ibsen's triumphant appearance at the Novelty, however, one of the 'big four' London managers mounted his most overtly didactic play, with a blaze of publicity and a degree of commitment completely disproportionate to the projected run of two matinee performances.

Tree's flirtations with Ibsen have been noted in earlier sections.<sup>2</sup> He saw a German production of An Enemy of the People (probably before 1890 and possibly by the Meininger troupe) and resolved to play Stockmann himself. Periodically, throughout the 1893 season, it was announced that rehearsals of An Enemy of the People had resumed at the Haymarket. The success of Hypatia and A Woman of No Importance may have made it difficult to slot in Ibsen's decidedly less commercial drama, but the relatively long runs these plays enjoyed may also have made the prospect of playing something different -- and

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<sup>1</sup>See Michael Meyer, "Strindberg in England," Essays on Strindberg (Stockholm: Strindberg Society, 1960), pp. 65-74. The first performance of any Strindberg play took place in 1906 (The Stronger and Simoom, New Stage Club). Lydia Yavorskaia performed in Simoom at the Empire, Liverpool, in 1910. The Father was seen at the Pavilion, Whitechapel, in Yiddish, in May 1911, and two months later the Adelphi Play Society sponsored another performance. In 1912, the Stage Society presented Creditors, and the Adelphi Play Society produced Miss Julie. John Drinkwater directed the Outlaw at the Birmingham Rep in 1914. The only West End performance of Strindberg prior to World War One was The Stronger, in which Yavorskaia played Mdlle. Y to Lady Tree's Madame X, as a curtain raiser at His Majesty's.

<sup>2</sup>s.a. Gretchen Paulus, "Beerbohm Tree and 'The New Drama,'" University of Toronto Quarterly, Vol. 27, no. 1 (1957), pp. 103-25. A succinct, though not entirely reliable, summary.

something daring -- all the more attractive to Tree. His duplicitous comments about Ibsen's technique account for some of the decisions he took in staging An Enemy of the People and explain the non-Ibsenite press's lenient -- even laudatory -- response to the production. At his lecture to the Royal Institute (May 26), for example, Tree described what was lacking in Ibsen's genius.

There is one side on which the genius of Ibsen is, in my humble judgment, distinctly wanting. He has hardly any love of beauty. I have no sympathy with the people who can only see in him the ugly and dismal. But he does seem to eschew the beautiful. To me this is a defect. There are people, I think, who prefer the ugly, who find a sort of aesthetic pleasure in ugliness for its own sake...[ellipses in original] Strange thing, I remember once, in a little mountain place in Germany -- the funeral of a young girl -- I saw an old woman crying, and spoke to her. 'She was my daughter,' the old woman said, 'and she was so young....and she had such a beautiful goitre!' Ibsenism is as rabid as anti-Ibsenism. Why, if you admire a fungus, deny beauty to a flower? And vice-versa.<sup>1</sup>

The Master Builder, however, was "on a higher plane" than An Enemy of the People: "In witnessing [The Master Builder] we are moved by its power, we are fascinated by its originality. Few fail to feel the thud of its pulse....The master has gained his end; he has stirred the imagination of his audience; he alone remains -- sphinxlike, he is the artist: wise master!"<sup>2</sup> Whether or not Ibsen was a "wise master," Tree was not content to serve under him. He claimed to approve of the depiction of modern tragic problems on the stage, but in his own

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Sunday Chronicle, July 2, 1893, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>From Tree's lecture "The Imaginative Faculty," May 26, 1893. Printed in Thoughts and After-Thoughts (London: Cassell, 1915), pp. 110-11.

production he minimized the sordid and ugly aspects of social realism and human bestiality, thinking that a comic interpretation provided a much more artistic (i.e. beautiful) product:

...whereas the exposition of the serious, the terrible problems of life treated in a serious manner is objected to as immoral [here he refers to Ghosts], the same problems will be voted 'harmless fun,' when subjected to comic treatment. Now isn't that true?...Of course, I think Ibsen revels in the ugly with a strange and humorless persistency. He appears to be saying, 'See how sordid life is,' not 'See how beautiful it may be' -- we can occasionally catch the distant banging of a Salvation drum. He appears to leave untouched the highest expression of dramatic art -- that which enables us to see our own ideals of life realised, our own aspirations requited -- that which enables us to forget the sordid side of life. A strange instance of this appalling artistic conscientiousness occurred recently in the case of an artist who painted the portrait of a very pretty woman. To the dismay of the lady's friends, her face was speckled all over. An enquiring Philistine ventured to question the artist why he had treated his fair sitter in so cruel a manner. 'Oh,' he replied, 'the fact is Mrs.----- was at that time recovering from nettle-rash, and -- I cannot stoop to flattery -- I paint what I see.' The truth, as exemplified by a pimple, may be too strongly insisted on in art.<sup>1</sup>

Anti-Ibsenites persisted in depicting Ibsen as a dour, humourless iconoclast, and usually reasoned that whenever one of his plays elicited laughter it could not possibly have been performed according to the dramatist's plan. At the first performances of Hedda Gabler the audience did not perceive anything comic in the play, as Robins explained to an interviewer:

'The public has a queer idea of Ibsen. They don't realize that the dear old man has a spark of humor about him. They come out with deadly seriousness and a grim determination to be intellectual and, ten to one, they don't get at half the play. 'Hedda Gabler' is full of laughs.

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<sup>1</sup>Raymond Blathwayt, "Mr. Beerbohm Tree at the Haymarket Theatre. A Talk about Plays and Acting," Black and White, May 27, 1893, p. 638.

The reporter blinked. 'But you can't hear them for the groans,' he said.

'You ought to. Listen for them next time.'<sup>1</sup>

At The Master Builder, many of the laughs resulted from injudicious translation or the thoroughgoing philistinism of the audience. The following year, when The Wild Duck was shown to be an amusing satire, non-Ibsenites assumed that all the comedy was intercalative. An Enemy of the People derives most of its inherent humour through painful ironic disillusionment and insightful character drawing, but Tree minimized the irony by inserting comic business whenever possible, by sacrificing most of the polemical passages of the dialogue, and by directing most of the supporting players toward farcical, single-dimensional characterizations. The result was that the play -- or what was left of it -- was funny and fully comprehensible to an audience reared on well-made melodrama, pantomime, and Daily Telegraph criticism. After struggling through Hedda Gabler and The Master Builder, most critics were astonished, and of course relieved, to be able to sit back and enjoy a jolly good romp.

The stage management of the meeting scene (Act IV) was admired by all, and indeed, it was meticulously planned and enacted by thirty to forty supers.<sup>2</sup> If Tree did see the Meininger production he must have

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<sup>1</sup>Interview by an American reporter at the time of Robins' performance of Hedda Gabler in New York, 1898. From the Harvard Theatre Collection, quoted in Jane C. Marcus, "Elizabeth Robins (A Biographical and Critical Study)," Ph.D. Diss, Northwestern University, 1973, pp. 88-9.

<sup>2</sup>The Beerbohm Tree Collection in the University of Bristol Theatre Collection includes two lists of extras. At the November 2, 1905 revival, twenty extra men, five boys, and six women were employed. The names on the second list do not correspond with those employed in 1905, so presumably it represents the 1893 cast. There are thirty six names on the second list, arranged in six groups of five, plus captains. A master

admired the Duke's handling of the crowd and remembered the effect it made. There was much, however, that was pure Tree -- or at least Tree inspired by a long tradition of pantomimic clowning; the passage incorporating some 'hat business' (Act IV) is typical:

Dr. Stockmann. Mr. Hovstad claims to be a free-thinker -- Hovstad (shouting). Prove it, Dr. Stockmann! When have I said so -- (pause) -- in print?  
 Dr. Stockmann (Reflecting.) No, upon my soul, you're right there, you've never had the frankness to do that (laughs) Mr. Hovstad. Let me be the free-thinker then. (Stockmann picks up a hat from the table behind him -- mistaking Aslaksen's for his own -- and smashes it down onto the table. Aslaksen then moves his own hat to the other side of the table, switching it with Stockmann's.) And now I'll make it clear to you all, and on scientific grounds too, that the masses are nothing but the raw material that must be fashioned into a people. (Smashes hat [presumably the one on the other side of the table, i.e. Aslaksen's].)  
 Crowd (murmurs, laughter, "he's mad," "turn him out," whistles and groans, "out with him.")  
 Stockmann. Is it not so with all other living creatures?  
 Drunken Man. Yes!  
 Stockmann. What a difference between a cultivated and an uncultivated breed of animals! (The Drunken Man mimics him.)  
 Man. We're not animals, Doctor.

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 plot of crowd responses in Act IV is extant, along with summaries of cues and reactions for each group. Presumably this was drawn up for the premiere and used again at revivals. Although carefully planned, Tree's crowd scene in no way measured to William Bloch's detailed orchestration of Act IV in his 1883 production at the Danish Royal Theatre. A hundred page booklet contains the text of interpolations to be spoken by no fewer than seventy five extras. Each character was given an occupation and was assigned individual reactions to events in the scene. Judging by the Markers' description of prompt books for this production, Tree's supernumerary plots are, in comparison, mere sketches, and the action in his production was much less carefully conceived. See Frederick J. and Lise-Lone Marker, The Scandinavian Theatre, A Short History (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), pp. 169-70.

Stockmann. Yes, on my soul, but we are animals. All of us.  
 Even my brother Peter is an animal. (laughs and points)  
 Burgomaster. What.  
 Stockmann. I did not say what sort of animal.<sup>1</sup>

The difference between Tree's height and that of E.M. Robson, who played Aslaksen the printer, was exploited, particularly in the second act. And in Act IV, when Stockmann begins his speech, the prompt books state that he "puts Aslaksen in chair" -- this apparently was a stool almost as high as Robson himself -- and every time Aslaksen slipped off in amazement, the audience roared with laughter.<sup>2</sup>

More spurious business, which may or may not have been invented since the premiere, is recorded in the prompt book compiled for the 1905 revival. Already well established as comic figures, Aslaksen and Hovstad turn into buffoons in the final act:

Hovstad. And then you ought not to have appeared in the matter under your own name. No one need have known that the attack on the Baths came from you. You should have taken me into your counsels, Dr. Stockmann. (Aslaksen winks.)  
 Stockmann (Stares straight in front of him; a light seems to break in upon him, and he looks thunder-struck.) Is this possible? Can such things be? (Wink.)  
 Aslaksen (Smiling.) It's plain enough that they can. But they ought to be managed delicately, you understand. (Aslaksen falls in chair. Slight laugh between Aslaksen and Hovstad.)  
 Stockmann (Calmly.) In one word, gentlemen, what is it you want? (Standing C, arms folded. Goes to them and they fall back.)  
 Aslaksen. Mr. Hovstad can best --  
 Hovstad. No, you explain, Aslaksen. (Rising, pushes Aslaksen to C.)

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<sup>1</sup>This passage and subsequent excerpts are compiled from An Enemy of the People prompt books, part books, and crowd plots in the Beerbohm Tree Collection, University of Bristol Theatre Collection.

<sup>2</sup>See William Alison, "The Drama. Haymarket. 'An Enemy of the People,'" Life, June 27, 1893, p. 11.

Aslaksen (with Hovstad behind him.) Well, it's this; now that we know how the matter really stands, we believe we can venture to place the People's Messenger at your disposal now.

Stockmann. Now that my father-in-law and I have bought up the shares at a discount you mean -- ?

Hovstad. Precisely.

Aslaksen. Yes. In a free community the press is a power, Doctor.

Their exit, which involves Stockmann chasing the offending visitors around the room, is swiftly performed in Tree's version; most of the dialogue is cut and only the action remains. The later prompt book also specifies how the Burgomaster's final exit was haltingly achieved:

Burgomaster (from UC.) It was nothing but a preconcerted requital for that vindictive old Morten Kiil's will. Stockmann (almost speechless). Peter -- you are the most God forsaken plebian I have ever known in my born days. (going slowly up to him from C.)

Burgomaster. All is over between us. (Goes. Stops.) Your dismissal is irrevocable (goes again -- stops) -- for now we have a weapon against you. (Opens his mouth as if to speak, [turns], he goes out, singing.)

In Act V (set in the drawing room of Acts I and II, not in Stockmann's study), Tree exploited the comic potential of the rocks that had been thrown at Stockmann's windows the previous night. At the beginning of the act, Ibsen specifies that the doctor is discovered raking out a large stone from beneath a cabinet. In the 1905 revival, the act began with a stone being hurtled through an already-broken window -- this is the stone that Stockmann declares he discovers when he makes his entrance. Tree found another stone one page later: "Would you have me stay here, where they have pilloried me as an enemy of the

people, branded me, and smashed my windows? (Finds a stone.) There's another. And look here, Katrina, they've torn a hole in my black trousers too."

When Petra tells him about the letters of complaint sent to her employer, Stockmann adds "Anonymous, of course," as he counts and polishes the stones in his pile. In the earlier prompt book he is counting stones again when the Burgomaster suggests that it may be a good idea for the doctor and his family to go away for a while: "Yes, I've had some thought of leaving the town (13 -- 14 -- counting stones)."

Tree found it difficult to resist a comic turn, and exaggerated the business with the Drunken Man in Act IV, completely overruling Ibsen's ironic alignment of the inebriated rate-payer with Stockmann, both isolated raisonneurs of minority views. Tree stationed the drunk at the front of the crowd (not SR, by the door), gave him a large drum with "Temperance Society" printed on its side (in the revival, if not the premiere), and maximized the physical and verbal interchange between the drunk and the doctor. The role was worked up to such an extent that in 1905, the drunk (Petersen) was billed and attained a fair amount of attention in the press notices.

Sentiment was also exaggerated and, where absent, inserted. There was to be no doubt that Stockmann's supremacy in his household was absolute. Mrs. Stockmann was a model of wifely devotion:

Mrs. Stockmann. You are doing us a great wrong, Mr. Hovstad,  
in encouraging my husband to make a fool of himself.  
Hovstad. I'm not making a fool of anyone.  
Stockmann. A fool!



Mrs. Stockmann. I know very well that you are the cleverest man in the town (he puts his face down; they kiss), but you're very easily made a fool of, Thomas.<sup>1</sup>

To many spectators, including Desmond MacCarthy, such touches were indicative of exemplary acting.

[Tree] was perfect in the impassioned, indignant harangues, in representing Stockmann's incredulous state of mind, his readiness to drop any number of points if only people will listen....When he was thundering from the platform about stuffy, selfish, ignoble homes, he had a characteristically subtle inspiration. Katerina, Stockmann's nervous, devoted wife, is sitting beside him. She has tried all along to prevent her husband embarking on his unpopular campaign, and her efforts have always drawn the same remark from him: 'Really, Katerina, you are a most extraordinary woman.' In the middle of his harangue about stuffy homes he put his hand for a second on her shoulder. It is hard to describe a gesture that is exactly right, but this one at that moment said as plainly as words: 'Of course, my dear, that is not a hit at you.' That momentary gesture expressed perfectly the relation between husband and wife.<sup>2</sup>

Even amid the tumult of horns, whistles, and school boys' fights, in the climactic moments of Act IV, a tableau of marital fidelity is struck:

Stockmann. The Majority is never right.  
Crowd (long uproar). "Always, always. Yes it is. You're not right. Out with him. Shame. Down with the Doctor, Order, order."

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<sup>1</sup>In Marx Aveling's unaltered translation, the passage is as follows (Act III):

Mrs. S. And you are wronging us, Mr. Hovstad, when you entice my husband away from his house and home, and befool him with all this business.

Hovstad. I am not aware I have befooled anyone in --

Dr. S. Befool! Do you think I should let myself be made a fool of?

Mrs. S. Yes, but you do. I know well that you are the cleverest man in town, but you so easily allow yourself to be taken in, Thomas.

(From *The Pillars of Society and Other Plays*, 1888.)

<sup>2</sup>Desmond MacCarthy, "From the Stalls," in Beerbohm, 1920, p. 223.

Stockmann (silencing them with a movement of his arms.)  
 Never, I say. Who make up the majority in any given country? (Little murmurs.) Is it the wise men (murmurs) -- or the fools? I think we must agree that the foolish folk are in a terrible, overwhelming majority, all the wide world over --(Aslaksen sits).  
 Crowd ("They don't," groans and hisses, whistles, "sit down, sit down, get out, get out.")  
 Stockmann (during this speech, Stockmann and his wife take each other's hands.) Yes, yes, you can shout me down, but you cannot gainsay me. The majority has might -- unhappily -- but right it has not. I and the few, the individuals, are right. The minority is always right.  
 Crowd ("No, it's not. out with the doctors. Sit down. Throw him out. Sit down." whistles).  
 Hovstad (rises.) Ha! ha! So Dr. Stockmann has turned aristocrat since the day before yesterday!  
 Stockmann. I have said that I won't waste a word on the little, narrow-chested, short-winded crew that lie in our wake (points to Hovstad).

The end of Act III was little changed, but Tree 'collaboated' with Ibsen to improve the endings of all the other acts. Instead of whirling a reluctant Mrs. Stockmann around the room, with laughter, applause, and cheers from the onlookers, Tree substituted an 'effective tableau' full of dramatic significance for the first act curtain:

Petra. Your health (clinks glass).  
 Billing. Your health Doctor (clinks glass).  
 Hovstad. Doctor (clinks glass).  
 Horster. I wish you nothing but the joy of your discovery.  
 (Business: Doctor is about to drink when the glass falls from his hand and breaks. [In 1893 the curtain fell at this point. In later performances, Tree looked at the glass, looked around the room, then shrugged his shoulders.]

At the conclusion of the second act, Stockmann wipes the tears from his wife's eyes, then summons his sons to his side. Ibsen's curtain lines are cut:

Stockmann. I want to have the right to look my boys in the face when they're grown into free men. (He takes each of the boys by the shoulders, looking straight into their faces. Admiringly, Mrs. Stockmann goes to Petra,

somewhat RC of Stockmann, and sobs on her shoulder. As the curtain falls, Stockmann is pictured smacking Eiliff's and Morten's cheeks.)

Tree decided that Ibsen included about three pages of superfluous dialogue at the end of Act IV. A show of hands is taken instead of a ballot; only the Drunken Man votes against the motion that Stockmann is an enemy of the people. Aslaksen raises three cheers for the Burgomaster, and dissolves the meeting. Billing raises three cheers for Aslaksen and three groans for Stockmann. Thomas and his family push their way through the crowd, with the boys fighting, etc. The curtain falls as Hovstad and Billing shake hands with Aslaksen. The final act also ends with the gesture of handshaking. About two pages are cut, as Stockmann skips from "Am I to let myself be beaten off the field by public opinion, and the compact majority, and all that sort of devilry?" to his declaration that he is the strongest man in town. He states his great discovery: "the fact is that the strongest man is he who stands most alone," then each character descends upon him in turn to take his hand.

Audiences did not quite forgive An Enemy of the People for being a drama about drains and sewers, but Tree's 'improvements' seemed to be sufficient to provide an entertaining afternoon. The first two matinees (June 14 and 20) were so successful that the performance was repeated the next week, and actually supplanted Wilde's comedy in the evening bill on July 20, 21, and 22. Seven performances in all were given in 1893, and the houses were excellent throughout, though Tree did not make any money from the venture. "The play drew golden

opinions, but never, except at its first matinee -- and I think that was an invitation one -- golden houses. It was always played to a loss."<sup>1</sup> The company was ill-prepared for the first performance, and the prompter's voice was frequently heard guiding Tree from one speech to the next. It was, according to Archer, below the level of other 'scratch' performances,<sup>2</sup> but nevertheless Tree's characterization showed promise. He frequently repeated the part, performing it again on July 20, 1894 (at the Haymarket), on his American tour in 1895 (where the play provoked a storm of 'boos' and 'bravos' in Chicago, with fist fights in the auditorium suspending the performance at various points), and intermittently in the English provinces. Despite frequent repetition, however, Tree was still 'fluffing' his way through the lines when the play was re-mounted for a revival at His Majesty's in 1905-6. At that time, a General Election was in progress and Stockmann's lines about "The damned, compact, liberal majority" were received with even more hooting and stomping than before, protracting the performance by several minutes. Many people were under the impression that Tree interpolated these lines, and he was compelled to demonstrate, in a letter to the Times, that they were not his words, but Ibsen's.<sup>3</sup> At the first performance (November 2), Asquith,

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<sup>1</sup>Maud Tree, quoted in Paulus, 1957, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>See William Archer, World, June 2, 1893, rpt. in Archer, 1894, p. 64. Many lines were dropped, but doubtless others were ad libbed in the gaping silences. Act I played about twenty minutes and Act II played in thirty two minutes; their running times were reduced by two and a half minutes each by November 2, 1905, and by an additional minute in Act I and four minutes in Act II at the next performance, November 30.

<sup>3</sup>H.B. Tree, "An Explanation by Mr. Tree," Letter to the Times, January 25, 1906, p. 6.

John Burns, Keir Hardie, Lloyd-George, and Winston Churchill were present, making it a truly political and topical event that was noticed in papers throughout the nation.

Even without "picturesque dresses or other decorative accompaniments" to embellish the crowd scene,<sup>1</sup> and without elaborate gowns or love entanglements to set off the leading ladies, more or less all of the five acts of An Enemy of the People succeeded in impressing playgoers on singularly hot afternoons in 1893. Why?

There is the familiar atmosphere of pessimism here as a matter of course. Ibsen looking on the bright side of things would not be Ibsen at all. But side by side with this invariable element there is shown in the play a truer and more direct realisation of human instincts and weaknesses than the methods of Ibsen as we know him on our stage have yet given us. It is as an 'acting play' that we must *appraise* An Enemy of the People...<sup>2</sup>

But was it not as an acting play that the critics praised A Doll's House, Ghosts, Hedda Gabler, and the rest? There must be more to it than that.

Its irony is scathing, its philosophical utterances are both true and suggestive, and the opportunities it offers to an actor are not few. Its simplicity, and the littlenesses with which it deals, are meanwhile childlike, and move ridicule. It is, indeed, all Ibsen -- that strange, quaint, mystical, provincial poet who interests, teases, impresses, and annoys, but has through all complete mastery of smiles and tears.<sup>3</sup>

So, despite its parochialism, the performance appealed on an emotional level and manipulated the British sensibility. Furthermore, it was transparent and morally sound.

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<sup>1</sup>Daily Chronicle, July 2, 1893 (from Beerbohm Tree Collection, Bristol).

<sup>2</sup>Daily Telegraph, June 15, 1893, p. 5, rpt. Egan, 1972, p. 300; N.B. this notice was not by Clement Scott.

<sup>3</sup>"'An Enemy of the People,'" Globe, June 15, 1893, p. 3.

Unlike several of Henrik Ibsen's plays, An Enemy of the People is in no way mystical or incomprehensible. The scene is laid in Norway, but the incidents might just as well have taken place in little Peddlington, for they expose the hollow conventionalisms of a certain class....This particular play of Ibsen's is essentially moral, was evidently written with the purpose of teaching a great lesson, and is absolutely free from any reference to those subjects which render several of 'the Master's' works more than unpalatable.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, An Enemy of the People was free from accusations of impropriety and distastefulness. What is more, it showed Ibsen to be an able stage craftsman, and for once his innovations were widely appreciated.

Walkley was surprised to find "a Norwegian type of 'agreeable rattle'; a skillful contriver of lively, bustling stage business,"<sup>2</sup> and unsympathetic reviewers forgave his tampering with conventions:

I...believe that, the author's absolute disregard for stage traditions not excepted, it is a superb play in the new school of drama which Ibsen is at once the pioneer and the master. Furthermore, that the disregard to time-honoured but exhausted custom is no drawback to the excellence of the work.<sup>3</sup>

And yet for many of these statements counter-claims were made by other critics. Reaction was pell-mell favourable and unfavourable, without marked divisions between Ibsenites and non-Ibsenites, and without each side representing extremes of approval and disapproval.

A variety of opinions were also expressed concerning Tree's performance. According to some critics, it was a showcase for Tree's talent for eccentric characterization and Stockmann was one of his best creations, embodying Ibsen's character perfectly, or even improving substantially upon it. According to other critics, either the play

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<sup>1</sup>"The Haymarket," Stage, June 15, 1893, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>'Spectator,' "The Theatre," Star, June 15, 1893, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>News of the World, June 18, 1893 (from Beerbohm Tree Collection, Bristol).

provided no opportunities to manifest Tree's special abilities, or else he had taken entirely the wrong approach. Pre-existing critical viewpoints did not dictate response: Archer, for example, had plenty of negative criticism but concluded that Tree's characterization "is a sketch which gives every promise of developing into a brilliant portrait," possibly better than that of the Munich Hoftheater's Stockmann, of whom Ibsen himself approved.<sup>1</sup> The critic in the Westminster Gazette, however, disagreed with his fellow-Ibsenite: Tree "was not bluff enough, nor simple and straightforward....Moreover, he presented too refined a person. Who believes a Dr. Stockmann with brown kid gloves and a frock coat rather tight in the waist?"<sup>2</sup> The majority of critics commended the supporting cast, readily forgiving their comic exaggerations. The exception was Alice Wright (who played Mrs. Stockmann), either because she gave the most naturalistic performance and exhibited, more than anyone else, the necessary technique and comprehension to perform in drama of this new style, or alternately because she underplayed to too great an extent and, compared to the rest of the (non-Ibsenite) cast was too physically and emotionally restrained.

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<sup>1</sup>William Archer, "'An Enemy of the People,'" World, June 21, 1893, rpt. Archer, 1894, p. 167. s.a. New Review, "Literature and the Drama," July 1893, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>"Music and the Theatre. 'An Enemy of the People' at the Haymarket," Westminster Gazette, June 6, 1893 (from the Beerbohm Tree Collection, Bristol).

Parodies, Burlesques, and Lectures

Much of Ibsen's former contentiousness was revived in 1893. Perhaps, toward the end of May, Ibsen was eclipsed by Mrs. Tanqueray as the favourite theatrical topic, but he certainly held sway until then. Robert Buchanan and Mr. Punch composed short verses about him, while 'Ophis' in Life and Anstey in Punch contributed parodies of The Master Builder in dialogue form. The latter spoof, "Pill-Doctor Herdal" was also included in the re-issued Mr. Punch's Pocket Ibsen.<sup>1</sup>

Anstey delights in satirizing some of the more incredible aspects of the plays, as well as continuing the sagas of some characters from earlier plays. Ten years after Solness' mighty fall, the family doctor, Herdal, has married the master builder's widow. Hilda, that "perambulating Allegory without a portmanteau" appears from nowhere and seems prepared to stay, just as before. How has she spent the intervening years?

HILDA:...I helped Ragnar Brovik. Didn't you know I stayed with him and poor little Kaia -- after that accident to my Master Builder? I made Ragnar build me the loveliest castle in the air -- lovelier, even, than poor Mr. Solness's would have been -- and we stood together on the very top. The steps were rather too much for Kaia. Besides, there was no room for her on top. And he put towering spires on all his semi-detached villas. Only, somehow, they didn't let. Then the castle in the air tumbled down, and Ragnar went into liquidation, and I continued my walking-tour.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"The Master Builder.' Ibsen's Latest," Life, March 4, 1893, pp. 6-7; F. Anstey, "Pill-Doctor Herdal," Punch, March 11, 18, and 25, 1893, pp. 112-3, 124-5, and 136-7; a Norwegian translation also appeared in Christiania, under the title Punch's Lomme-Ibsen (1893).

<sup>2</sup>Anstey, 1893, p. 178.



She then met the Tesmans and took up with George -- but he shot himself through the ticket-pocket when he discovered that Thea was wearing straws in her hair. After that, she rented Rosmersholm and persuaded Kroll to mount the White Horse; he was found in the mill stream a fortnight later. At last she has come to claim Herdal because he flirted with her ten years before. He was a troll in those days, but now he will never roll a pill again: "No -- nothing but cosy commonplace grey powders for a whole troop of children." Hilda suggests that they roll magnificent rainbow-coloured poisonous pills. Herdal hesitates -- after all, what would the neighbours say?<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Herd. ...it does occur to me that such doings may be misunderstood -- by the narrow-minded and conventional...

Hilda (with an outburst). Oh, that all seems so foolish --so irrelevant! As if the whole thing wasn't intended as an Allegory!

Dr. Herd. (relieved). Ah, so long as it is merely allegorical, of course -- But what is it an allegory of, Hilda?

Hilda (reflects in vain). How can you sit there and ask such questions? I suppose I am a symbol of some sort.

Dr. Herd. (as a thought flashes upon him). A cymbal?...Then am I a cymbal too, Hilda?

Hilda. Why yes -- what else? You represent the Artist-worker, or the Elder Generation, or the Pursuit of the Ideal, or a Bilious Conscience -- or something or other. You're all right!

Dr. Herd. (shakes his head). Am I?...Well, well, cymbals are meant to clash a little.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Herdal is afraid to take his own physics -- never mind rainbow-coloured pills -- but Hilda is determined that he shall swallow his own medicine. He says he would probably burst if he tried it, whereupon Hilda looks deeply into his eyes and says "So long as you

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 136.

burst beautifully!"<sup>1</sup> Solness' fall was perceived as a meaningless, non-ending, and Hilda's response to his death was just as unsatisfactory for Victorian audiences, as this shows:

Hilda (exulting with great intensity). At last! Now I see him in there, great and free again, mixing the powder in a spoon --with jam!...Now he raises the spoon. Higher --higher still! (A gulp is audible from within.) My -- my Pill-Doctor!<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, however, Herdal's assistant had the presence of mind to fill all the dispensary jars with chalk. He recognizes Hilda and coaxes her into admitting that she is Nora Helmer, his long-lost wife. Their marriage can be a true one now -- he will let her forge cheques morning and night -- and they go off together, leaving Herdal and his old clerk to patent the rainbow pills.

Another parody of The Master Builder was staged by the Independent Theatre Society on July 10. Jerry-Builder Solness, by Florence Bell, closely follows Ibsen's plot, with the characters travestied and the action enlivened. The dénouement is reached when Solness climbs to the top of one of his buildings and falls to the very basement. The St. James's Gazette irreverently wondered if the original was not funnier than the parody, but the audience certainly enjoyed the one-act version, as performed by Violet Vanbrugh and James Welch.<sup>3</sup>

Bernard Shaw's second play, The Philanderer, in which a typical male Ibsenite and a certain anti-Ibsen critic were embodied in

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 198.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, p. 201.

<sup>3</sup>A copy of this play has not been located. It was not submitted for licensing and consequently is not among the Lord Chamberlain's Plays.

Leonard Charteris and Joseph Cuthbertson, and a former Ibsenite girlfriend (Florence Farr) was represented in *Grace Tranfield*,<sup>1</sup> was completed in May 1893. No doubt William Archer would have considered the Independent Theatre Society's difficulty with casting and Shaw's inability (or disinclination) to find another producer fortunate under the circumstances. It was, according to Archer, "a monument of vulgarity" suited only to bring Ibsen and his works into disrepute.<sup>2</sup>

A lively discussion followed Edward Aveling's lecture on "Ibsen and Socialism" at the Playgoers' Club, on April 9. Aveling spoke out against the quality of criticism levelled at the recent production of The Master Builder, but the bulk of the lecture was devoted to proving that economic conditions and sexual inequality were the causes of social decay. There was little justification for lessons in Marxism at the Playgoers' Club, particularly since Aveling criticized Ibsen for not being a socialist, for failing to understand the economic corruption underlying society, and for having a pessimistic outlook despite the noble future that was destined to succeed the revolution.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Josephine Johnson, Florence Farr. Bernard Shaw's 'New Woman' (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smyth, 1975), p. 58.

<sup>2</sup>See Anna Irene Miller, The Independent Theatre in Europe. 1887 to the Present (New York: Ray Long and Richard R. Smith, 1931), p. 175; and William Archer, Study and Stage (London: Grant Richards, 1899), p. 6. When it was produced at the Court Theatre in February 1907, Walkley wrote: "There is an 'Ibsen Club' in the play, and much talk of 'Ibsenism' -- oh! those remote 'nineties! Here is a play hardly more than a dozen yeas old, and yet already out of date and even rococo!" Drama and Life (London: Methuen, 1907), p. 249.

<sup>3</sup>See "Music and the Drama," Weekly Sun, April 16, 1893, p. 6; Stage, April 13, 1893, p. 9; and 'Carados,' Dramatic and Musical Gossip, "Referee," April 16, 1893, p. 2.

Mary S. Gilliland's lecture on "Ibsen's Women" (London Ethical Society, December 10) was a marked contrast to Aveling's. She had obviously read The Quintessence of Ibsenism and agreed with much of it. She regarded Ibsen as a social critic concerned with problems like women's entrapment in marriage, their limitations within a purely domestic sphere, and their victimization by economics and law. Thus, the important issue in A Doll's House is not whether Nora should have left or stayed, but that she should not have been there in the first place. Gilliland saw Ibsen as a meliorist, but his mission was to point out what not to do and how not to live rather than to suggest solutions. Attempts to identify explicit directions for 'the way forward' were thwarted by Hedda Gabler:

Striking utterances of the claims of individuals to a wider life and greater liberty of action, striking instances of the evil effects of tyranny and restriction, scattered through the writings, induced the hasty induction that for Ibsen the path to personal strength and happiness and to individual richness of life lay along a road strewn with shattered ideals, through binding ties and irksome claims. How upsetting to all this it was to be confronted with Hedda Gabler -- Hedda who is healthy and clever, who has determined that in her life's plans 'nothing will have any claim upon' her, who finds even love 'a joke,' but who yet is forced to the conclusion that 'the only vocation' she has 'in the world is for one thing,' viz., 'to bore the life out of' herself. The play is oppressive in the almost unbroken ugliness and vulgarity of life it portrays.<sup>1</sup>

Ibsen shows no joy or beauty -- he is an awakener who cautions against some ineffective methods of escape from what is evil and oppressive in modern society. "If we keep our mind open, so that [we understand] what he shows us, we shall find that our feet are set towards the broad

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<sup>1</sup>M.S. Gilliland, "Ibsen's Women." A Lecture Given before the London Ethical Society (London: William Reeves, 1894), p. 26.

and healthy highways, where he will have helped us see the sun."<sup>1</sup> The lecture was published by the London Ethical Society in the first part of 1894.

### The Achievements of 1893 and After

Despite the busy and adventurous schedule of productions in 1893, including premieres of two important Ibsen plays and a reading of one act of Brand, the season reinforced old notions of Ibsen and his influence rather than creating a revolution in dramatic taste. Playgoers' and critics' impressions were changing subtly, but the Ibsenites were still a small group of intelligent playgoers and fashionable hangers-on, inconsiderable relative to the mass of theatre-goers who preferred most anything else to the tedious babble of an Ibsen play. Even among the people who genuinely wanted to see a change in native playwriting, many were careful to distinguish between serious drama and 'dustbin' or 'hospital' drama, and Ibsen's direct influence on plays like The Second Mrs. Tanqueray was not always admitted, least of all by their authors.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Tanqueray's success demonstrates that conventions had broken down, and that while playgoers still went to the theatre to get away from life they were dissatisfied with what was

purely artificial; they might recoil from Ibsen's vision of human nature but they were better able to regard histrionic affectations as conventions rather than necessities. No one ever thought that The Master Builder would be a commercial success, or that as an experiment in symbolism it would have wide appeal, but according to Archer's calculations Ibsen's public paid more than £4,600 in admission between June 7, 1889 and March 18, 1893.<sup>2</sup> The 'mausoleum' of critical abuse and derision that had been built around Ibsen's name was not quite as monumental as Archer perceived, for he really was recognized as a genius, a visionary, and a leader, and as a craftsman and theorist he was widely admired even by those who objected to his methods or teachings. For several reasons, the British were increasingly reluctant and unable to dismiss Ibsen as a pessimistic, parochial, fly-by-night hot-gospeller. Eleanora Duse's London performances made it patently obvious, even to the least observant theatre-goers, that Ibsen was acclaimed internationally. He carried weight in intellectual circles and engendered esteem in fashionable and 'respectable' society (not just among a ridiculous clique of aesthetes). Furthermore, though the Haymarket's An Enemy of the People might not have been the most reverent production, it was apparent that Tree did not produce the play in order to jump on a bandwagon or to take advantage of Ibsen's controversiality, but rather because he saw in it a rollicking good part for himself and an attraction for the Haymarket's customary afternoon and evening clientele.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>See William Archer, "The Mausoleum of Ibsen," Fortnightly Review, July 1893, pp. 77-91, partially rpt. in Egan, 1972, pp. 304-12.

In the years that followed, the range of critical response remained just as broad as before. New critics replaced the old, and Ibsen's sympathizers had an increasingly authoritative and resonant voice, but of course opinion was never unanimous. The last years of the century saw numerous responsible, significant productions. Once the notion that Ibsen was exclusively a thesis writer had been dispelled, audiences discovered a sensitive problem-poser rather than just a preacher. In 1896, Little Eyolf was staged by some of Ibsen's most faithful and talented interpreters (Courtenay Thorpe, Janet Achurch, Elizabeth Robins, and Stella Campbell) in a commercial setting, and the public loved it. The I.T.S. soldiered on, with a production of The Wild Duck, revivals of Ghosts, A Doll's House, and the Theatre de l'Oeuvre's Rosmersholme and Solness le Constructeur. The New Century Theatre and the Stage Society gave the English premieres of John Gabriel Borkman, The League of Youth, and When We Dead Awaken. In the first years of the twentieth century, Ibsen was well treated by the Stage Society, and at the Court, but it is Gordon Craig's Vikings at Helgeland (with Ellen Terry as Hjordis), Stella Campbell's Hedda Gabler, and Tree's revivals of An Enemy of the People that really stand out. It is clear from Ibsen's obituaries that many old prejudices lingered and that more than a few critics chose to ignore all the progress that had been made to establish Ibsen in the English repertoire and to inspire a new generation of dramatists. To an extent, the judgements made by such critics are valid, since Ibsen (though admired) was relegated to the fringes of theatrical activity

and ceased to attract the attention of the majority to the vital drama that once inspired such antagonism and adoration. In many respects, Ibsen triumphed but the nature of the triumph was often misunderstood, leaving the Ibsenites with a misapprehended view of their accomplishments and the anti-Ibsen partisans with justification and the opportunities to organize a resurgence of conservatism. Disregard and misinterpretation of the last plays, as described in the following chapter, characterize the years remaining before Ibsen's death.



CHAPTER 8  
 TRIUMPH, MISUNDERSTANDING, and  
 THE FATE OF IBSEN: 1894-1906

The comfortable [Edwardian] theatre-going public...seemed entirely satisfied with the entertainment it was given. There had been, during the nineties, some attempts to induce it to take some interest in what was considered a more advanced drama, but that had had very little effect. Ibsen was now regarded rather in the way that in recent days, we have looked at a bomb or land mine which has been 'dealt with' and rendered harmless; there had been a time when his plays might have been devastatingly dangerous but that was, somehow, happily passed. (Allan Wade)<sup>1</sup>

In some respects, the next twelve years represent a period of triumph for the Ibsenite cause. Many Ibsen performances, including premieres and revivals, took place; foreign companies brought their productions to London, facilitating comparisons with English efforts; Ibsen's new plays received almost instantaneous translation and publication; and more and more established literary critics wrote respectful -- even laudatory -- reviews and analytical essays about the 'Giant of the North.' This record of triumph is, however, somewhat misleading. Although many productions were mounted, they fell in

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<sup>1</sup>Allan Wade (assistant to Granville Barker and secretary of the Incorporated Stage Society), Memories of the London Theatre 1900-1914 (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1983), pp. 2-3.

clusters at the beginning and the end of the period, so that between July 1897, and March 1901, only one performance of one play was given, and it received only one brief notice in the press.<sup>1</sup> Only one production (Little Eyolf, 1896) was a success financially. In the first years of the new century, foreign companies and private play societies virtually monopolized Ibsen, and while reviewers enjoyed berating these performances, the English professionals who fared so well in comparison had long since stepped out of the picture. The published plays sold well but instead of providing Ibsen with new theatrical opportunities (as printed translations had done in the 1889-91 period), he was relegated to the bookshelf: albeit as a classic writer, but not quite as a living, vital, productive author. Short parodies and comic adaptations were published in magazines but there was no chance of a production like Ibsen's Ghost or The Gifted Lady.<sup>2</sup> His increasing acceptance among conservative journalists and

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<sup>1</sup>The League of Youth, produced by the Stage Society at the Vaudeville Theatre, February 25, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>On May 6, 1895, a one-act burlesque called Threepenny Bits, by Israel Zangwill, was performed at the Garrick. A young woman, played by Violet Vanbrugh, parallels her situation to that of Nora Helmer, but the play is not an Ibsen satire. It is based on Zangwill's chapter "The Beautiful Ghoul" in The Old Maids' Club (New York: Tait, 1892), pp. 291-307. Soon after Little Eyolf was published, F. Anstey's "Little Mopseman" appeared in Punch, February 2, 9, and 16, 1895, pp. 52-3, 64-5, and 76-7, rpt. in The Pocket Ibsen, 1895, pp. 210-66. A fourth act, "Extract of Eyolf," was added by Barry Pain in Black and White, December 19, 1896, p. 790. Malcolm Watson's sequel to John Gabriel Borkman, "Pretty Fanny's Ways," appeared in the Theatre, March 1897, pp. 137-42. St. John Hankin parodied The Lady from the Sea in Punch, May 8, 1901, pp. 339-40, rpt. Mr. Punch's Dramatic Sequels, illus. E. J. Wheeler (London: Bradbury, Agnew, 1901).

academics simply proved the early Ibsenites' point -- that Ibsen is a first-class dramatist and poet -- but treatises on that theme attracted little attention by 1906, and were quite unprovocative even in 1894.

The Ibsenites' dream of a revitalised, literary, modern theatre had fractured, but it had not vanished. Shaw, Galsworthy, and Barker seemed to fulfill, or at least to outline, a dramatic renaissance on modernist principles. More importantly, they operated successfully -- and profitably -- in their own theatre, the Royal Court in Sloane Square, from 1904 to 1907. Their iconoclastic, socially relevant plays, written in a realistic style, produced by a sympathetic, stable, artistic-commercial management, and performed by the new generation of actors, signify progress in the aesthetic and business spheres. Unlike most of the English plays presented by the I.T.S. in the 90s, John E. Vedrenne's selections demonstrate that Ibsen's lessons in social realism and his innovations in construction, characterization, and dialogue were understood and ably employed, while Ibsen's early tendency to expose the hypocrisies of sex, class, and idealism were taken up as major -- almost exclusive -- themes. His later experiments in symbolism, mysticism, and dramatic austerity interested Vedrenne and Barker somewhat, but true to their time they avoided the final plays, producing only the well-comprehended Wild Duck and Hedda Gabler. Contemporary deviants from the realistic play of ideas were snubbed in England, and although there was a vogue for ancient Greek tragedies, they were performed at the Court "as though they had been written for the modern stage." Euripides' plays were presented in the 'modernist'

style: no music or dance and a chorus of seven or eight women "who moved about with slow, elaborate caution, posed like tableaux vivants, and uttered the most various sentiments in a monotonous and lugubrious chant, tapering into dismal contralto notes, and conveying no definite emotion."<sup>1</sup> A small amount of interest was shown in Reinhardt, but the London theatre remained far behind the vanguard producers of Germany and Scandinavia in their exploration of proto-expressionism and scenic stylization. The Independents often found it difficult enough to afford conventional scenery, but this is not the only reason that Ibsen's last two spectacular plays were failures on the English stage.

William Archer, drama critic for the World until 1905, continued to be regarded as the father of English Ibsenism, but Edmund Gosse piped in occasionally to remind everyone of his heroism in the 70s. With Bernard Shaw's appointment as critic for the Saturday Review (January 1895 - May 1898), his deeds of the 80s and early 90s also grew in repute, but his new pronouncements on Ibsen make the activities of this period seem more dynamic than they, perhaps, really were. In general, as young critics supplanted the anti-Ibsen writers, criticism became more temperate and respect for Ibsen gradually became the journalistic norm, killing controversy and discrediting those who tried to defame Ibsen in the old way.

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<sup>1</sup>Desmond MacCarthy, The Court Theatre 1904-1907 (1907), ed. Stanley Weintraub (Coral Gables: U. of Miami Press, 1966), pp. 19; 19-20.

Clement Scott retired, in disgrace, from the Daily Telegraph in December 1898, and an era of wholesome Robertsonian naivete ended.<sup>1</sup> Anti-Ibsen sentiment was never fully routed, and a few stubborn survivors of the old guard did not just ignore, but forever denied that Ibsen met any success in London. Their criticism reads like the quaint apophthegms of an ancient war, and sadly lacks the creative, virulent, spiteful tang of 1891. To a certain extent, however, their assertion that Ibsen had not succeeded in London, despite ample chances, and that by 1906 his cultural legacy was slightly harmful or distorting, but mainly ridiculous, was correct. Interest in his 'symbolism' and 'hidden meaning' faded as the Gaiety, music halls, and smart society comedies reached their zenith, and of course Ibsen had lost all his power to shock people into noticing him. He had been, as Allan Wade described, 'defused.'

In spite of the tolerance of most reviewers, there is much evidence that neo-anti-Ibsenism emerged in the late 90s, along with 'qualified' Ibsenism that excluded When We Dead Awaken. Thus, the 'Ibsen Legend' has two diegetic outcomes, depending on the chronicler's outlook: either Ibsen's triumph was absolute, or he was totally

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<sup>1</sup>Scott was dismissed from Truth and the I.L.N. in 1896. His resignation from the Daily Telegraph was preceded by a scandal arising from remarks about actresses' morality. See Raymond Blathwayt, "Does the Theatre make for Good? An Interview with Mr. Clement Scott" (London: A.W. Hall, 1898), rpt. from Great Thoughts, January 1, 1898.

overwhelmed by the music hall and other popular entertainments. These two versions account for the fulsome eulogy and bitter denunciations that were both apparent at the time of the dramatist's death.

This chapter aims to provide a generalized account and interpretation of Ibsen-related activities between 1894 and 1906, and of the dissipation of the Ibsenite impulse. His reputation as an iconoclast endured but the final plays were not fully appreciated, even by his admirers. An analysis of the acting styles employed by successful Ibsenite performers, and experiments in the technical presentation of a few plays suggests that turn of the century audiences and critics were unappreciative of Ibsen's extreme deviation from melodramatic conventions, which amounted to violation rather than mere bending of precious theatrical codes. The new semiotic was too radical for performers, audiences, and readers alike. By expressing a marked preference for the polemical/social plays of 1877-91 (The Pillars of Society to Hedda Gabler), even sympathetic commentators implied a rejection of later developments in the dramatist's technique. The English theatre had adopted the play of ideas and argument, it admitted social issues, new characters, and novel situations, but 'harps in the air,' and soul mates' journeys toward the mountains, the stars, or "the vast silences" could not be tolerated.

Dissolution of the Ibsenite Impulse

Ibsenites were not the organized band of anarchic, atheistic socialists that conservative critics tended to describe, nor were they ever a well-regimented group systematically conniving to revolutionize English drama. Many different sorts of people admired Ibsen's plays, and they expressed their admiration in myriad ways. Ibsenite activities occurred sporadically, often in isolation, and frequently on ill-advice. The 'Ibsenite organization,' insofar as it existed at all, consisted of a few dozen prominent actors, financiers, producers, critics, writers, and translators who, after meeting through their work, might occasionally cooperate, but usually operated as haphazardly and independently as before.

The strange disparity between Ibsenites' genuine veneration of Ibsen and their half-hearted commendation of him is nowhere more apparent than in the bungled attempt to demonstrate English appreciation on Ibsen's seventieth birthday. As the anniversary approached, Archer, Gosse, and H.W. Massingham distributed circulars inviting subscriptions of one guinea or more to be put toward a gift. Forty donations totalling fifty pounds and eleven shillings were collected, and the committee decided to send a silver loving-cup, ladle, and matching smaller cup to the dramatist, with a vellum-printed letter of explanation and congratulations. The choice of the gift was, apparently, done without consultation of the donors, but was mysteriously considered fitting because it was an exact copy of a

ciborium given to George II. The replica ciborium became something of a joke in England,<sup>1</sup> but nevertheless when Karl Keilhau, a Christiania newspaper editor, delivered the gift, Ibsen was pleased.<sup>2</sup>

While the list of subscribers includes the names of many theatrical, literary, and academic figures one would expect to find there,<sup>3</sup> other well-known Ibsenites knew nothing of the subscription until

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<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Robins could hardly contain her despair and confusion in an interview with an American reporter. "'I haven't an idea what the thing is we're giving the dear man. It's a c-i-b-o-r-i-u-m,' she spelled. She looked at the reporter hopefully but he didn't come to the rescue....' Well, I hope it isn't anything improper,' she sighed." (From the Harvard Theatre Collection, quoted in Marcus, 1973, p. 89.)

<sup>2</sup>Keilhau wrote: "I opened the oak case...and took out the vellum address. Ibsen appeared to be greatly impressed by the magnificence of the gift. I explained to him what the various objects were, and their origin. He was obviously very much moved. While we were standing in front of the oak case, and admiring, visitors began to arrive -- a deputation of the Storthing...deputations representing the University, Christiania theatres, etc., etc. Ibsen then asked me to translate the address....He then himself read out all the names of the subscribers from the fly-leaf. Ibsen repeated again and again that it was a splendid present and all the afternoon he was occupied in taking his hundreds of visitors, in parties, up to the case, showing them the objects, and explaining their origin." (Quoted in Bredsdorff, 1960, p. 181.)

<sup>3</sup>The 'Loving Cup' subscribers were: Prof. Robert and Mrs. Adamson, S.M. Adye, Capt. Charles Archer, William Archer, H.H. Asquith (the Prime Minister), J.M. Barrie, Mrs. Hugh Bell, Henry Bond, Prof. A.C. Bradley, Sir Martin Conway, T.H. Elliott, Richard Garnett, Edmund Gosse, Thomas Hardy, Henry Harland, Jane Harrison, William Heinemann, Prof. C.H. Herford, Charles Hughes, Henry James, George Macdonald, R.S. Manford, Edward H. March, P. Chalmers Mitchell, Prof. Gilbert A. Murray, Sydney S. Pawling, Charlotte Payne-Townshend, Claude Phillips, Elizabeth Robins, Edward Rose, A.G. Ross, R.B. Ross, George Bernard Shaw, Julian Sturgis, Alfred Sutro, H.B. Tree and Arthur Pinero (who each gave three guineas!), T. Fisher Unwin, and Arthur W. Verall. (*Ibid*, p. 181). Robins' copy of the list shows that Walter Scott also contributed three shillings (Fales Library).



March 20, 1898 (Ibsen's birthdate) and they were outraged. The existence of Jacob Grein and Dorothy Leighton -- in fact, the whole I.T.S. -- was completely forgotten.<sup>1</sup> Shaw would not accept the excuse that "Ibsen's seventieth birthday was rushed on an unprepared world with such precipitation that there was no time to communicate with more than the few nearest Ibsenites,"<sup>2</sup> and he was quite correct to query the committee's right to represent their gift as England's tribute. Nevertheless, the press enjoyed this instance of Ibsenite incompetence; the Daily Chronicle printed a volley of letters, and the Academy printed a satiric "Diary of Progress" for the celebrations.

Some time in winter. -- Mr. Gosse remembers that Ibsen's 70th birthday is imminent, and makes a note of it in his Birthday Presentation memorandum book....

Sunday, Mar 20. -- Ibsen's birthday in Christiania. Arrival of letter...accompanied by silver gifts. Ibsen is grateful, but has not the slightest notion what to do with them  
....Receives hundreds of telegrams and letters from, among others, King Oscar, Queen Sophie, the Norwegian Crown Prince, and Mr. Justin McCarthy. Christiania, Berlin, and other cities en fete. Special performances of Ibsen's plays on the Continent. None in London....

Mar. 23.....No performance of play in London. Threat uttered in the Chronicle by Miss Janet Achurch and Mr Charles Charrington to write some day the history of the Ibsen want of movement in England.<sup>3</sup>

Had the matter been kept private, as Archer and Gosse had intended, there would not have been such a fracas. The satirist's jibe at England's lack of theatrical tributes to 'the Master' -- or rather the

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<sup>1</sup>See D. Leighton letter to editor, Daily Chronicle, March 21, 1898, p. 3; and W. Archer letter to E. Gosse, March 22, 1898 (rpt. Bredsdorff, 1960, p. 182.)

<sup>2</sup>G.B. Shaw, "England's Delicate Compliment to Ibsen," Saturday Review, March 26, 1898. Rpt. Our Theatres in the Nineties, Vol. 3 (London: Constable, 1932), p. 342. (Hereafter abbreviated OTN.)

<sup>3</sup>"Ibsen's 70th Birthday. A Diary of Progress," Academy, March 26, 1898, pp. 352-3.

complete lack of demonstrations of his mastery -- is apt. Neither at this festal time nor in the regular season was Ibsen a mainstay of the repertoire.

Independent producers, who had been the lifeline of Thespian Ibsenites, continued to be important, but the mid-90s and early 1900s are demarcated by different personnel.

Robins personally produced Ibsen for the last time in November 1896, when she directed Little Eyolf for a brief run at the Avenue Theatre. Much to Archer's surprise, the Examiner of Plays granted a license, and public reaction to the printed play was quite good. The I.T.S. hoped to mount the play in the spring of 1885, but Robins (who had never worked with the I.T.S. <sup>on Ibsen</sup>) obtained the rights herself. It turned out to be the most commercial and controversial of her productions, despite a shaky beginning. The production was one of Robins' idealistic labours of love (this time for a vaguely announced 'Ibsen Fund'), but houses were not very large the first week, and poor advance sales for the second week spawned dissent. Charrington, on behalf of the I.T.S., was prepared to take over the production, in which case Robins might quietly step out. Stella Campbell was "restive" in the role of the Rat Wife, and Robins was against playing without her -- especially when Maud Tree proposed herself as Campbell's replacement. Achurch played superbly (despite heavy 'drugging,' pregnancy, and serious financial worries) but after the first week, she formally resigned. When she left, after the second week, she was replaced by Campbell, whose drawing power and salary were used more economically in

an evening run.<sup>1</sup> Achurch's stormy, tempestuous Rita was quelled to a gentle, seductive, passionate, and sympathetic mortal by Campbell, and the merits of each interpretation were contentiously argued by larger and larger audiences.

Private play producing societies were responsible for most Ibsen productions. The I.T.S. publicized and promoted Ibsen as one of the gurus of the modernist movement, but the only original Ibsen productions it mounted were Ghosts and The Wild Duck, which was performed three times in May 1894. In March 1895, the I.T.S. sponsored a visit by Lugne-Poe's Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, which gave performances of Rosmersholme, Solness le Constructeur, and Maeterlinck's L'Intruse and Pelleas et Melisande. In May 1897, A Doll's House and The Wild Duck were given short runs under the I.T.S. banner but this is somewhat misleading since Charrington directed both plays and his Doll's House was performed for the Manchester I.T.S. in April, and in July had a brief commercial stint at the Grand, Islington. The I.T.S. presented a revival of Ghosts in June 1897, purely out of disrespect to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations, but the society had been in financial difficulties for years, and thereafter ceased activities. In addition to hosting Charrington's Doll's House, the Manchester branch also saw Louis Calvert's An Enemy of the People and Robins' Hedda Gabler and Master Builder in 1894.

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<sup>1</sup>See correspondence in the Fales Library: Archer to Pinero, January 16, 1895, and another undated letter [early 1895]; Achurch to Robins, November 23, 1896, and her resignation dated November 28 (but not posted until November 30); Archer to Robins, November 25, 1896; Florence Bell to Robins, letter dated "Thursday" [November 26?]; and Robins to Archer December 6, 1896.

Two other independent societies took the place of the I.T.S. The New Century Theatre was inaugurated in May 1897 with the English premiere of John Gabriel Borkman. From 1897 to 1903, the N.C.T. hoped to produce Peer Gynt with costumes borrowed from the Christiania Theatre, relying on Grieg's music to bring a profit.<sup>1</sup> The managing committee did not want to appear as if the Society relied too heavily upon Ibsen,<sup>2</sup> but neither did they want the play to fall into the wrong hands.<sup>3</sup> In 1900, Shaw recommended that the Incorporated Stage Society (later the Stage Society), also a subscription theatre operating with professional casts but on Sunday nights, produce Peer Gynt over two evenings, but his suggestion was not taken up.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the Stage Society's first Ibsen production was The League of Youth (1900); it

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<sup>1</sup>See Robins, 1932, p. 215, and Archer's letter to Alfred Sutro, February 26, 1897 (Fales Library).

<sup>2</sup>The N.C.T.'s mandate was "to provide a permanent machinery for the production, from time to time, of plays of intrinsic interest which find no place on the stage in the ordinary way of theatrical business." Repetition of an author might, one presumes, be construed as favouritism; the managing committee (consisting of Robins, Archer, Massingham, and Alfred Sutro) made it clear "that they are devoted to no special school or tendency; that their productions will not be exclusively 'literary,' in the narrow sense of the word, and still less 'educational' or instructive; that they do not propose, in a word, to present the Undramatic Drama in any of its disguises." The society's leaders did not wish to repeat the follies of the I.T.S. by producing new plays for their own sake -- they must be actable and interesting to the group's patrons. (From the John Gabriel Borkman programme, Gabrielle Enthoven Collection, Theatre Museum.)

<sup>3</sup>Archer assumed that the play would have to be cut and suggested that he would do a better job of preparing Acts I-III for the N.C.T. than W.B. Yeats, Arthur Symonds, and Gilbert Murray would do for a society called the Marquers. "Now it would be a great misfortune if they went ahead & made a hash of it," but how could Archer (the translator) refuse another society the rights if he had no plans for it himself? See Archer's letter to Robins, dated June 30, 1903 (Fales Library).

<sup>4</sup>Letter from Shaw to Charrington, March 4, 1900, in Laurence, 1972, p. 150.

presented two other English premieres, When We Dead Awaken (1903) and Lady Inger of Ostraat (1906), and revivals of The Pillars of Society (1901) and The Lady from the Sea (1902).

In 1901, the Deutsches Theater visited London, privately presenting Nora oder Puppenheim; they returned in 1905 to give seven performances of Die Wildente. Other foreign visitors include Réjane (as Nora in 1903 and 1907), and Duse (as Hedda in 1903 and 1905). An unknown German company performed Rosmersholm in 1906. Native commercial managements were only slightly less reticent about Ibsen than before, and the few who did stage new productions were extraordinary. Tree's production of An Enemy of the People was revived in 1905 and 1909. In 1905 Vedrenne and Barker produced The Wild Duck, and two years later backed Stella Campbell in Hedda Gabler. In 1903, Ellen Terry leased the Imperial Theatre to showcase her son's scenographic talents: their first project was The Vikings.

In 1900, the Playgoers became a proper club, with permanent premises, and enjoyed lectures by Janet Achurch and B.W. Findon (on "The Trail of the Ibsen Serpent").<sup>1</sup> Readings were occasionally given by individuals, and although Ibsen was still technically excluded from the universities, Gilbert Murray devoted one of his public lectures at Glasgow to the telling of stories from Ibsen (some time in 1897). For the students it was "a new and thrilling experience," but Murray's colleagues were scandalized.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>B.W. Findon, The Playgoers' Club 1884-1905. Its History and Memories (London: Playgoers Club, 1905), pp. 41, 54.

<sup>2</sup>Jessie Stewart, Jane Ellen Harrison. A Portrait from Letters (London: Merlin Press, 1959), pp. 83-4.

### Identifying an Acting Style

Not surprisingly, the acting in revivals attracted more attention than the plays themselves. Perhaps because the plays written after 1891 are on masculine themes and feature Solness, Almlers, Borkman, and Rubek foremost, actors like Laurence Irving, Lewis Waller, W.H. Vernon, John Martin-Harvey, and Granville Barker took notice of Ibsen's newest and some of his middle plays. Encouraged by the reaction to these plays, they began to reassess male roles in the more famous social dramas. Whether a change in the sexual prejudice of star casting permitted leading men, and even matinee idols, to take part in Hedda Gabler, A Doll's House, and The Lady from the Sea, or whether *they simply desired a change from long runs*,<sup>1</sup> Ibsen prospered from the loan of these actors' experience, popularity, and prestige.

The failure to achieve a balanced ensemble (either with the specifically Ibsenite stars of the early 90s or the West End stars who succeeded them) was often regretted, but not too acutely missed as long as the principals avoided external acting. Ibsenites' standards of realism and authentication did not exclude exaggeration, affectation, declamation, and playing to the audience, however; they wanted the

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<sup>1</sup>This was Robins' contention. "It was always easy to get together a splendid cast for an Ibsen drama in London. The actors and actresses like to go into it as a relief from their monotonous one-role season." (From an interview ca. March 1898, at the time of her appearances as Hedda Gabler in New York. Harvard Theatre Collection, quoted in Marcus, 1973, p. 88.) For actresses there was an additional incentive: the opportunity to perform in unusual roles, out of the regular line of business.

plays presented as dramas of ordinary life, with psychological plausibility, but at the same time there was always a demand for theatricality modified but not completely divorced from the popular stage. In order to achieve theatricality, even the Ibsenite stars used techniques antithetical to the strict naturalists' ideal.

Along with their discovery of Ibsen's textual richness, successful performers also found where he had left actors to make their own effects their own way as a joint creator of the drama.<sup>1</sup> More than a subdued, unsentimentalized technique was required: Ibsen needed actors who could employ a variety of effects, who could seem human yet superhuman, and convey emotion without undue emotionalism. This might be called the synthesis of "code-observing and code-breaking," manipulated to create an acceptable and recognizable aesthetic and presentational formal semiotic adapted to current standards of modernistic acting.<sup>2</sup> It was up to the actors' inherent talent, intelligence, and sensitivity to maintain an appearance of truth and nature, but audiences and performers were steeped in melodramatic tradition, and Achurch, Robins, Waring, and Wright were simply the best at melding the old conventions and new renderings of them into an appropriate aesthetic. Their performances were restrained, but their range, their experience, and their milieu also enabled them to creditably perform theatricalized gestures like Nora's tarantella,

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<sup>1</sup>Robins describes this effect in Ibsen and the Actress, 1928, pp. 52-4. s.a. Gay Gibson Cima, "Discovering Signs: The Emergence of the Critical Actor in Ibsen," Theatre Journal, 35, No. 1 (March 1983), pp. 5-22.

<sup>2</sup>Keir Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), pp. 59 and 86.

Hedda's destruction of the manuscript and pulling of Thea's hair, or like Torvald's drunken amorousness, and Mrs. Alving's reckoning with truth and her son's idiocy. Unsuccessful aspirants resorted to familiar stage types at these moments, and more experienced actors had even more difficulty avoiding this temptation.<sup>1</sup> While a complete reliance on convention was fatal, a conglomeration of old and new could, it seems, bring success.

*The plays of the 90s* presented another problem for actors. Some characters still called for the quiet underplaying of the social plays' secondary roles, but the leads gave scope for incorporation of fantastic, even surreal effects. These later characters -- intangible, slightly bizarre, eccentric individuals -- were new and unique. Thus, instead of assuming that characters were familiar types, they were increasingly found to be unrecognizable and therefore incomprehensible. Previously, Ibsen had exploited aspects of conventional types to build on the legacy of the well-made play, but the characters who superseded Krogstad, Manders, Gina, and Stockmann were wholly new creations. For actors, versatility was the key.

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<sup>1</sup>As Shaw observed in the Quintessence, Ibsen's genius lay in exposing the conventions that were understood to be dramatic art, and so an uncollaborative actor playing Torvald "begins by declaring that the part is a mass of 'inconsistencies,' and ends by suddenly grasping the idea that it is only Joseph Surface over again." (Appendix to the first edition, rpt. Shaw, 1958, p. 1.) Similarly, when Dalton played the Stranger in The Lady from the Sea (1891), he portrayed the character like an Adelphi villain; depending on the critics' outlook this was either the highlight or the disgrace of the production.



Recognition, though not necessarily comprehension, of the new symbolic mode brought credit to actors who could transcend the realistic contexts of the plays. Robins was a great master of this. She was capable of super-subtle intellectual acting and excelled as Martha Bernick, Christine Linden, and Asta Allmers, but she could also ascend to chilling, surreal effects as Hedda and Hilde, motivating their strange other-worldliness and creating uncanny characterizations that were, at the same time, monstrous and believable personalities. Had she been capable only of subdued naturalistic acting, her Hedda Gabler surely would not have brought about a contract at the Adelphi. Almost without exception, however, when acting reputations were 'made' by Ibsen, they were made in the social plays of the 80s and late 70s.

By the mid 90s, Ibsen's social plays were quite familiar to playgoers who bothered to attend revivals. In a very short time, the favoured plays had acquired fixed role interpretations that audiences accepted as correct: thus, Helmer was a contemptible prig, Tesman was an insufferable pedant, and Hjalmar was a comic humbug. New interpretations were measured against precedents, much as newcomers were tested in popular Shakespearean or melodramatic roles. In 1894, reports of a startling new Ibsen interpreter crossed the Atlantic, but almost three years passed before London audiences were able to see this actor's reinterpretations of roles, delivered, as it were, by flashes of

lightning. His name was Courtenay Thorpe.<sup>1</sup> A close examination of some of his effects reveals another representative of the conglomerate (or eclectic) method also used by Outram, Achurch, and Wright.

Thorpe has been little celebrated since the 90s, but his importance is undeniable. Like Achurch, he trained with Frank Benson's company, and succeeded in Shakespearean roles as varied as Prince Hal, Hamlet's Ghost, and the Duke in Measure for Measure. His personal appearance was bizarre, but not only because of his gloved false hand and full make-up, worn at all times, on and off the stage. James Agate describes him as follows: "He looked like some pale symbol and gaunt effigy of rejuvenation, whose age it was impossible to guess. His complicated make-up, including an auburn wig, held together what remained of a marvelous, strange, quattro-cento beauty, glassy and unalive."<sup>2</sup> As Allmers, he reminded Gerald Duckworth of Holman Hunt's The Light of the World.<sup>3</sup> His mien easily suggested the weakened, syphilitic Oswald. As Torvald, however, he surprised everyone with a believable portrayal of an ordinary, compassionate man, rather than a contemptible prig.

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<sup>1</sup>Thorpe played in Ghosts at the Berkeley Lyceum, New York City, January 5, 1894, and with the same company at the Tremont Theatre, Boston. He also performed in A Doll's House at the Empire Theatre, New York City, on February 15, 1894, opposite Minnie Madern Fiske.

<sup>2</sup>James Agate, Ego. The Autobiography of James Agate (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1935), pp. 64-5. s.a. Paulus, 1959, pp. 75-6. When Thorpe died in April 1927, doctors gave his age as seventy eight, but Agate thought he was much older. "Courtenay always looked either twenty-four or eighty, generally twenty-four, and never anything inbetween." (p. 67) Thus, even at the age of forty eight, he was hailed as the best new, young actor to play Ibsen in 1896-7. He also acted in the Manchester I.T.S.'s Ghosts.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Duckworth to Robins, ca. November 24, 1896, (Fales Library).

He was just the well-looking, presentable, smooth-tongued, plausible man whose passion might have been mistaken by a weak Nora for love, and whose egotism and self-esteem might have been merged in some hazy woman's notions of strong will, power, and strength of character. The sudden and constant change of mood suggested by the young actor was most admirable. He was never acting at all, but we all knew the man.<sup>1</sup>

As Torvald and Oswald, Thorpe brought the male protagonist to prominence, forcing spectators to re-examine the human balance of the plays, to forget that they were social pamphlets (if they had not done so years before), and to discover binary character development. Although he played opposite the traditional Nora (Achurch) and Mrs. Alving (Wright), Thorpe raised his roles to at least an equal footing with the female leads. On the Continent, in Brahm's, Antoine's, and Lindberg's productions, Oswald had always been the focus of Ghosts because the actor-producer emphasized the scandalous subject found in Oswald's melodrama of defeat, rather than Mrs. Alving's tragedy of self-realization. In England, however, where Ibsen was regarded as a 'woman's writer' by all but Herbert Tree, Thorpe gave the first performance of sufficient power to contradict this supposition. It is particularly significant, then, that in A Doll's House, of all the 'new woman' plays, a man was able to make his reputation and to force a re-examination of the meaning of the play.

At last, for Clement Scott, the final scene of A Doll's House actually made sense. He described Thorpe's performance from the moment Torvald discovers the incriminating letter:

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<sup>1</sup>"The Independent Theatre," Daily Telegraph, May 11, 1897, p. 8.

Here Courtenay Thorpe, flying in the face of all the Ibsen tradition, dared to act, and not to chant or moan, and he acted with such force and reality that we almost were inclined to believe that a woman, Nora or anyone else, could run away from her children and become as obstinate as a mule in the presence of such a wretched specimen of humanity. The acting was so good that, if we may express it so, the man became the hysterical woman, and the woman became the silent, sullen, and determined man....The danger removed, cowardice disappeared, and the egotist asserted himself once more. It left the man, however, not only weak, whimpering, and demoralised, but old, withered, and scarred with the fury of that mental tempest. The handsome young fellow was changed into a haggard old man.<sup>1</sup>

While he brought new insight to the doll's house, Thorpe's technique was far from theatrical naturalism. He was physically well-suited to play Oswald, but instead of being content to let his inherent eeriness carry the role, "his very large share of the original sin of picturesqueness and romanticism broke out so strongly that he borrowed little from realism except its pathological horrors."<sup>2</sup> The effect, though, was harrowing:

I shudder when I think of the agony I endured in the last act. Ugh! I saw women near me growing pale with fright, closing their eyes and stopping their ears in sheer terror. Beside this slow, stealthy, furtive, crafty apocalypse of mental ruin how trivial, how vapid are the horrors of even our Macbeths, our Lears, our Hamlets!<sup>3</sup>

It is significant that some critics found his Hjalmar and Torvald slightly stagey, emotional, and precious. He often repeated the first words of sentences to lend emphasis, and occasionally affected nervous stumblings for the same reason. According to Shaw, he delivered two or three of Torvald's lines as "points," deliberately breaking the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>G.B. Shaw, "Ghosts at the Jubilee," Saturday Review, July 3, 1897. rpt. OTN, Vol. 3, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup>J.D., "Independent Theatre, 'Ghosts,'" Star, June 26, 1897, p. 2.

naturalistic illusion to underline the character's conceitedness.

Shaw's use of the word 'points' is important, for it suggests the style of Edmund Kean, and a rhetorical sign out-dated since the mid-century.<sup>1</sup> Like Kean, Thorpe played on the audience's familiarity with the role, sharply breaking the illusion of the realistic context, and even of the two-dimensional painted stage. In spite of this, or perhaps because of it, his effect was invariably great, and amazingly appropriate to the role and the play.

George H. Lewes recognized that good acting consists of the appropriate selection and expression of symbols. Like the poet, the actor signifies nature by selecting typical symbols idealizing but not copying reality. Lewes was thinking of cup and saucer domestic drama when he wrote: "The nearer the approach to every-day reality implied by the author in his characters and language...the closer must be the actor's imitation of every-day manner; but even then he must idealise, i.e. select and heighten -- and it is for his tact to determine how much."<sup>2</sup> This principle was understood and applied by those Ibsenites

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<sup>1</sup>"Of point-making there is little to be said after mid-century. Points depend not so much on the plays as vehicles, as on the familiarity of the audience with the texts performed, a familiarity which was nearly impossible after the old stock plays had passed from the current repertory. The making of points (which was the very essence of the style of Kean) demands careful preparation and study, yet there were certain standardized and approved techniques for announcing to the audience that a moment for applause -- a clap-trap -- had arrived." Alan S. Downer, "Players and the Painted Stage. Nineteenth Century Acting," PMLA, 61 (June 1946), pp. 572-3.

<sup>2</sup>G.H. Lewes, On Actors and the Art of Acting (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1875), pp. 124.

who sensed the proper balance between what Lewes aptly named "the optique du théâtre" and "what the audience will recognise as truth",<sup>1</sup> and it is what Thorpe's performances relied upon.

Janet Achurch, too, was an Ibsen master but no one ever described her performances as consistently naturalistic. Even as Ellida (1902), her technique was marked by "angularity of movement and deliberate intoning of lines."<sup>2</sup> As Nora, her performances in the 90s were full of tricks and 'points' calculated to merge the butterfly and the ranting suffragette so eternally incompatible in the Victorian imagination.

She has not ceased to give certain points with an unnecessary kind of bouncing emphasis, or to fail in economy of gesture. This kind of defect came out most fully but not solely in the second act, when she was alone with her meditations of self-slaughter. It was no doubt due to an impulse to overpass the hoydenish side of Nora, and to make Ibsen's meaning clear to the slowest.<sup>3</sup>

The principle difference between the techniques of Achurch and Duse, both excellent in their way, was that one emphasized the legitimate melodramatics, while the other removed them wherever possible. Duse imbued Nora with an aura of actuality, but to the British sense of aesthetics -- even to William Archer's -- Duse's "dread of becoming melodramatic" resulted in her failure to be "legitimately dramatic," despite her sound psychological interpretation and richly detailed

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>"The Stage Society's Production of Ibsen's 'Lady from the Sea,'" I.L.N., May 10, 1902, p. 702.

<sup>3</sup>From the Manchester Guardian, April 13, 1897, rpt. in C.E. Montague, ed., The Manchester Stage 1880-1900 (London: Archibald Constable, 1901), pp. 93-4.

performance.<sup>1</sup> Even to the advanced guard of British playgoers, fidelity to the author's intention, if achieved solely by subtle psychological playing, was unsatisfactory in a major Ibsen character.

While Achurch sometimes erred on the side of overplaying, Alice Wright achieved a perfect balance -- to the fin de siècle aesthetic taste -- and was consistently acclaimed as the reincarnation of Mrs. Alving. Michael Field's diary records impressions of a carefully detailed and varied portrayal.

[In the first act, a] calm woman enters, with the most gracious welcome in her manners. Her voice is low and perfectly natural. She has that brusque independence consonant with a sound charm some women have who are used to managing estates and giving important orders. She is fair, her blonde hair carefully heaped, her complexion somewhat colourless, her eyes unemphatic....She is full of maternal benignity.<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Alving was an intellectual but womanly woman, domestic and practical, something like Ellen Terry's Lady Macbeth. Wright was unmistakably Terry's contemporary, capable of picturesque and charming effects in Shakespeare, but unlike Terry she could summon tragic power and transcend prettiness, youth, and grace in Ibsen. She had the ability to subtly transform her mien according to the character's situation, thus "the beautiful maternal change in her whole being when Oswald enters is a great sight to see." This description, suggesting a close physical, emotional, and intellectual identification with Mrs. Alving, represents naturalistic acting at its best. In the last

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<sup>1</sup>W. Archer, "A Doll's House," World; rpt. Archer, 1894, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup>BL Add. MS 46781, V. 6, 1893. Entry for January 26.

scene, Wright visibly switched into a different style, and though emotional involvement was probably still intense, her medium of expression -- her actual behaviour -- was melodramatic.

Her entrance in the 3rd Act is fine -- the stubborn resolution she will have done with the farce is impressed on her face -- there is a freedom about her movements. She is exquisite to her poor son, till [sic] the worst comes out, when her impulsive maternity grows hysterical. And when the supreme moment of the play is reached and Oswald, refusing to pity the father who had cursed him, turns to his mother and asks her to take back the life she gave him -- at that moment she makes from the room screaming.

This is precisely in accordance with Ibsen's specifications.

Mrs. Alving runs into the hall, calling for help. She promises to end her son's life if it becomes necessary, not believing that it will.

Wright's vocal and emotional tone again completely changed in the course of a few short speeches.

Dawn comes -- she loops back the curtain. Oswald asks with a blank face for the sun. 'What do you say?' she asks unsuspectingly with her tender voice.

'The sun -- the sun.'

She comes to him -- terror grips her -- first physical terror -- then the mental terror before the situation. She finds the morphia pills, screams, hesitates -- but her last words are No, no.

The sun -- the sun.

And she leaves him in his haunted night, she will not lay the ghosts.

Wright's performance, punctuated with shrieks and pauses, drew its power from the tragedy of the situation but also, for a nineteenth century audience, from the adaptation of melodramatic convention. In another concession to contemporary taste, Wright decided that



Mrs. Alving "dooms [Oswald] to fester on alive" and made this clear to the audience. Nevertheless, Michael Field, the author of the foregoing description, concluded that this eclectic multi-pitched performance was "the most complete piece of acting" she had seen.

Wright's depiction differed from that of a wholly traditional tragic actress, for the Stage judged her a failure in the last act, "where the resources of powerful acting must be drawn upon."<sup>1</sup> By playing in an adapted melodramatic manner, however, obedient to Ibsen's requests for gesture and emotion, Wright transcended the presentational aspects of melodramatic performance and revealed the poetic horror of the scene. In other words, she collaborated with Ibsen and convinced her audience -- the elite of the London avant garde, particularly intolerant of histrionic technique and acting for effect, that a truth about reality was being played. While Mrs. Alving's effect was one of simplicity and naturalism, the semiotics by which it was achieved were

not necessarily realistic, yet she was sufficiently conventional to wring praise from the champion of Robertsonian realism, Clement Scott, who was reminded of Fanny Stirling.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, Scott's opinion of Ellen Terry's performance in The Vikings is unknown. Terry's light, picturesque style, which was inappropriate for Lady Macbeth, was even more deficient for Hjordis, and she complained that the role was strange for her.<sup>3</sup> Her wifely devotion to the Scottish nobleman carried some scenes,<sup>4</sup> but in the Nordic milieu true womanliness was a handicap. A predominantly external, rather than an internal technique was required for this warrior-woman, a semi-mythologized prototype of Nora, Lona, Rebecca, Hedda, and Hilde, who is enamoured with the idea of a man killing the ferocious white bear that once guarded her chamber door.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"The Royalty," Stage, March 19, 1891, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Fanny Stirling's forte was comedy. Frank Benson described her as "essentially natural and human, though not of a certain modern natural type, that is comparatively untrained....she spoke her lines beautifully, because she felt them beautifully, and into every part in which she was really interested, could throw a compelling animation, a truth, and a sincerity that enabled her, at times, to rise from mere impersonation to that loftiest and rarest of all histrionic achievements -- absolute personification." In Percy Allen, The Stage Life of Mrs. Stirling (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1922), pp. 224-5. Wright had read literature with Stirling and remarked that her teaching and style were "indelibly photographed on my memory." She considered the rest of her training to have come from watching the great actresses, especially Duse and Bernhardt. "A Chat with Mrs. Theodore Wright," Sketch, March 6, 1895, p. 302.

<sup>3</sup>See Terry's letters to Archer, BL Add. MS 45295, fol. 162-6 and 168-70. Terry struggled with the long speeches and the concept of the character: "I try all the while -- and most times feel like a Pig trying to whistle."

<sup>4</sup>See Alan Hughes, Henry Irving, Shakespearean (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1981), pp. 94-114.

<sup>5</sup>Brian Johnston suggests that the difficulty of portraying Hjordis may stem from Ibsen's failure to satisfactorily humanize the mythic elements in the character. In this early play, the supernatural or superhuman

It is a melancholy thing to see Miss Ellen Terry, that incarnation of our capricious English sunlight, grappling with the part of Hjordis, and trying so hard not to turn it all 'to favour and to prettiness.' Now and again, she does contrive to break away from herself, and becomes a sort of abstract figure; but, even so, she is always a pleasant, English abstraction -- a genial Britannia ruling unfrozen waves.<sup>6</sup>

Terry's charming, ethereal presence, discernable even through her bearhide and porcupine quill costume<sup>7</sup> was better suited to Hjordis' rival, Dagny, but her standing compelled her to take the starring role. It is likely that a wholly conventional actress of the classical school would have been best for Hjordis, and that Robins and Wright, who invariably combined psychological authenticity with histrionic technique (even in melodrama), would also have seemed out of place on the Aasgaardsreiden -- the conveyance of the dead to Valhalla. Genevieve Ward and Maud Tree gave acceptable performances in The Pillars of Society and John Gabriel Borkman; Terry would probably

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aspects of Hjordis are not fully integrated into her human world, and the result is that "there is no way one can get 'near' such a character, and the characters surrounding her, who are grievously affected by her, seem unable to react reasonably and firmly to her. Normal responses and reactions are abandoned for a scale of 'heroic' acting that, to succeed, would have to be grandly theatrical and external in the High Victorian mode." To the Third Empire. Ibsen's Early Drama (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1980), pp. 97.

<sup>6</sup>Max Beerbohm, "At the Imperial Theatre," Saturday Review, April 25, 1903. rpt. More Theatres (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1969), p. 565.

<sup>7</sup>Shaw lightheartedly described her as dressed in "a particularly cosy bearskin mantle which heaps her shoulders up to her ears and gives her an air of jollity which positively radiates goodnature in spite of the unfortunate lady's efforts to make mischief. Having ruined her shoulders, [Craig] abolishes her neck with its stately nape, by connecting her head with the small of her back with a hedge of porcupine quills which need only a coat of yellow ochre to make Hjordis a perfect squaw on the warpath." Letter to Ellen Terry, May 15, 1903, in Laurence, 1972, p. 324.

have given an excellent performance as Solveig, Ellida, or Ella Rentheim, parts to which she was temperamentally more suited.<sup>1</sup>

### The Means of Production

After the I.T.S.'s first few seasons, the idea of a private play producing society no longer seemed novel or subversive. The I.T.S. quickly made its point about censorship, artistic alternatives, and an English literary theatre, and although it originally violated expectations about the socio-economics of play production in asserting that anything of historical and cultural importance could take place in third-rate out-of-the-way playhouses like the Novelty or Royalty, with unknown casts and minimal budgets, independent producers and unfashionable venues were soon indelibly encoded upon Ibsen.<sup>2</sup> The formation of the N.C.T. and Stage Society institutionalized private performances, and under the subscription system, Ibsen promised a safe (though modest) return plus the artistic credit and satisfaction that accrued to the adventurous. Most productions paid their way, which was desirable even though it meant that the audiences included few new recruits. Long runs and lavish scenery were out of the question, but whereas in the early 90s scratch casts and makeshift sets sufficed

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<sup>1</sup>For a description of the acting style of the other performers, and particularly of the adaptations necessitated by Craig's settings, props, and costumes, see Christopher Innes, Edward Gordon Craig (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983), pp. 87, 90-1, 94.

<sup>2</sup>When it was proposed that Ibsen should be an integral part of an English national theatre's repertoire, Ibsen was still earmarked for a second, intimate stage for elite theatre-goers. see G.B. Shaw letter to Archer, March 1902, in Laurence, 1972, p. 265.

- they sometimes even enhanced the daringness of a performance
- Ibsen's last plays suffered immeasurably by the modest conditions in which they were seen.

In the late nineteenth-century, it was fairly easy to equip the social plays with serviceable settings. Except for The Lady from the Sea, they all take place indoors, and realistic drawing room sets were a staple of the scene room. Of course, the most conscientious producers preferred to obtain the best possible settings, incorporating authentic Norwegian details, as in the Doll's House of 1889, and The Master Builder or 1893. Usually, though, their budgets necessitated using the stock settings of the hired theatre. Robins' difficulty in getting satisfaction on the most rudimentary requirements of Hedda Gabler -- an inner room and French doors leading to the back garden -- is indicative of the problems endured when the theatre's stock was inadequate.

...when George R. Foss, the stage manager for Hedda Gabler, arrived at the Vaudeville (which Robins had secured after many rejections from other theatres), he discovered that the Diamond Deane set then on the Vaudeville stage could not be struck. The theatre owned a stock farce set that might fit in front but the symbolically important glass door to the verandah could not be arranged. After talking to Foss, Robins rushed to the Haymarket Theatre in hopes of locating a stock drawing room set [capitalizing on her acquaintance with Tree], but the Haymarket flats were nineteen feet tall and the Vaudeville accommodated only eighteen-foot flats. Furthermore, the Haymarket set only allowed a three-foot deep recess for the essential inner room of the Hedda Gabler set. Finally an Opera Comique set was discovered and the manageresses could proceed to publicize their venture.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cima, 1980, p. 152. Cima draws on letters written by Foss to Lea, (March 18 and 19, 1891), in the Fales Library.

The settings rarely received comment, probably because stock scenery seemed good enough for matinees and private performances, and reviewers were content not to see anything too monstrously inappropriate.<sup>1</sup>

Some producers, unable to provide acceptable scenery, either abandoned the play (as the I.T.S. did in the face of "insuperable difficulties connected with the elaborate scenery required" for The Lady from the Sea),<sup>2</sup> or made a virtue out of poverty (as was the Stage Society's policy -- they performed with costumes but no sets),<sup>3</sup> or they did the best they could with what was available (this was the N.C.T.'s solution).

At the turn of the century, the minimum weekly expense of running a play on the West End was four hundred pounds,<sup>4</sup> but of course there was every likelihood that investments would be returned -- if not in London then on foreign or provincial tours. Ibsenites, by necessity, were frugal. Only one producer dared to disregard the maxim that 'Ibsen does not pay,' and backed a lavishly outfitted production of a virtually unknown play. Ironically, this production -- certainly the most daring and innovative presentation of Ibsen during the period -- occurred in a commercial context, and starred the leading lady of the

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<sup>1</sup>Kate Terry Gielgud's remark that for the Deutsches Theater Nora oder Puppenheim (1901), "the mounting was most meagre, not even adequate" is inexplicable. Surely Vedrenne could have acquired appropriate settings if he had wanted to. If the company toured without scenery was the meagreness was intentional? K.T. Gielgud, A Victorian Playgoer (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup>"Theatrical and Musical Notes," Morning Post, May 3, 1897, p. 4. This production, "postponed till the autumn," never occurred at all.

<sup>3</sup>Miller, 1931, p. 177.

<sup>4</sup>From the Preface to William Archer, The Theatrical 'World' of 1894 (London: Walter Scott, 1895), p. xiii.

English stage (who was not even an Ibsenite). Furthermore, the little-known play, written in 1858, was not staged for any literary reason but simply as a showcase for the talents of a great scenographer. The play was The Vikings at Helgeland, the leading lady was Ellen Terry, and designs and direction were by Edward Gordon Craig. This production reinforces the argument that negative reaction was precipitated by Ibsen's and his interpreters' breach of the codes of playwriting and stagecraft, while tolerance was shown when the symbolic conventions were only bent. This point will be resumed after a brief description of Craig's treatment of The Vikings.

It is evident from the reviews that Craig's ideas were fairly well known and controversial when The Vikings opened on April 15, 1903. Terry engaged the Imperial Theatre for a season, planning, with her son's assistance, to offer a season of plays, though The Vikings became the first of only two productions. To a certain extent, Craig staged the play on conventional lines, bringing out the romantic costume melodrama, incorporating music by Martin Shaw, and exploiting picturesque groupings and tableaux. The context in which this all occurred was, however, revolutionary for its time. Craig's designs for props and costumes are comprehensive, but his ideas for the lighting and settings are particularly interesting.

Craig objected to the unnatural effects created by footlights and borders, so he installed a batten of lights behind the proscenium arch and lit the play solely from above. (Limelight was also used in at least one scene -- at the beginning of Act III, as Hjordis prepared the

bow and arrows.)<sup>1</sup> This chiaroscuro, which obscured the actors and appeared -- to Edwardian eyes -- wholly unnatural, complemented the "vague and nebulous backgrounds which suggest as nothing else can illimitable space."<sup>2</sup> The thirty or more Viking warriors,<sup>3</sup> decked out with large headgear and heavy beards, were even more shadowy presences than the principals.

The settings were not at all realistic, but provided a symbolic representation of the atmosphere that Ibsen describes: a barbarous, feudal world, combining mythological, romantic, and human elements. The curtain rose on a 'living picture' of the landing of Sigurd's men. Fred Pegram's sketch depicts "a great platform of rock that sloped down toward the front of the stage, with cliffs rising against a dark undefined background....Craig spread out his actors, bringing the chief character into prominence, and brought the action as close as possible to the audience."<sup>4</sup> The simplicity of these lines, representing a rocky coast, focussed attention on the dark, mysterious background as well as the foreground, but because the locale was indistinct and the illumination so unusual, the scene was not appreciated:

There is no particular reason why the coast of Helgeland should be represented as undistinguishable from the mouth of Acheron, or why these boisterous Vikings should be condemned

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<sup>1</sup>Cary M. Mazer, Shakespeare Refashioned. Elizabethan Plays on Edwardian Stages (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>'E.F.S.' ('Monocle'), "The Stage from the Stalls. 'The Vikings,'" Sketch, April 22, 1903, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>The names of thirty eight men and ten women are listed in the programme as "Vikings, Guests, Serving-maids, Outlaws, &c." (Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson Theatre Collection.)

<sup>4</sup>Denis Bablet, Edward Gordon Craig (1962), trans. Daphne Woodward (London: Heinemann, 1966), p. 59. s.a. Sphere, April 18, 1903.



to swim about in a murky blue haze like the dramatised 'Water-Babies' or the forlorn specimens in an ill-tended aquarium tank.<sup>1</sup>

In the first act, the semi-circle of curtains was unlit, and so appeared as a grey mass, seeming to stretch upward to infinity. In the second act, lighting revealed these same curtains to be rainbow-coloured gauzes, through which the torchlights moving upstage could be seen.<sup>2</sup> Downstage, Craig placed an open circular table, and benches to facilitate the banqueting. An enormous wrought-iron circle holding lights was suspended above. "The impression was one of solemnity, of a feudal world, with the candelabrum suggesting a huge iron crown."<sup>3</sup> The third act setting opened up the space, utilizing drapery to suggest an opening in a vertical expanse of wall. For the last act, on the seashore before Thorolf's grave, Craig designed

A vast, unbroken black background, a space for death (the death of Hjordis); and in the front of the stage a steep slope towards the footlights, rounded at its upper edge -- a kind of naked hillock where the stark drama would be played out. That was all.<sup>4</sup>

According to Christopher Innes, this mound or hillock was created solely through the lighting -- there was no physical structure there at all -- but the illusion was so complete that an artist included it in a rendering.<sup>5</sup> Craig's famous drawing of a single warrior, isolated in a pool of light and framed by the curtains and arch, depicts this scene (see Appendix D).

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<sup>1</sup>'B.,' "The Theatre. 'The Vikings,'" World, April 12, 1903, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>See Innes, 1983, pp. 84-5 and 87.

<sup>3</sup>Babiet, 1962, pp 59-60.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup>Innes, 1983, p. 95.

The scale of The Vikings experiment makes it seem a freak among Ibsen productions, anomalous with the trend of discrediting and laying aside Ibsen, but the experimentation with the physical representation of his plays was not without precedent. The techniques of the new stagecraft were beyond the means of the private societies to whom Ibsen had been relegated, but English Ibsenites did conduct another modest experiment in lighting and stage design, in line with modernist principles. Audiences' and critics' failure to perceive these experiments as experiments partially accounts for the tendency to dismiss Ibsen in the early 1900s, for the neglect of John Gabriel Borkman, the failure to appreciate the excellence of When We Dead Awaken, and the enduring English preference for the plays of 1877-91.

In The Vikings, Craig used lighting in a stylized, symbolic fashion, but while the effects he created were new, the code for the blue haze of Act I, for example, was an equally familiar convention to the patrons of melodrama, pantomime, and Wagnerian opera:<sup>1</sup> it was only the intensity and focus that some critics objected to. In John Gabriel Borkman, the N.C.T. used lighting in a naturalistic manner; again, the effect was new but this time the code was not understood. W.H. Vernon's use of sparse candle and lamp light complemented the quiet, restrained acting, but it was unconventional, and therefore not recognized. It increased non-Ibsenites' dissatisfaction with the figurative gloom, the lugubrious pace, and the 'commonplace mutterings'

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<sup>1</sup>See Terence Rees, Theatre Lighting in the Age of Gas (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1978), pp 148-55.

of the characters. It shows the producer's desire to cooperate in the artistry of the play, but to an audience member like Kate Terry Gielgud it was blatantly untheatrical:

I do most strongly protest against realism being carried to the point of a very ill-lighted stage...illuminated in patches by unshaded candles and ill-shaped lamps. A play worthy the name is none the worse for a little judicious attention to stage-management and illusion.<sup>1</sup>

Such illumination -- dim by late Victorian standards -- is faithful to the instructions in the text.

Vernon's apparently close reading may also have made him try to provide the called for sets, but if he had a scenographic concept for the play, his ideas crumbled under financial constraints and were, at best, only partly realized. While The Vikings' stark, unconventional settings were shocking and thus noteworthy, John Gabriel Borkman appeared much like other experimental, independent productions, and because the impoverished makeshift sets fit the convention of such performances, they did not attract notice. Fortunately, though, Shaw took the trouble to describe "the usual shabby circumstances" of the production of the latest dramatic masterpiece:

The first performance of John Gabriel Borkman...has taken place in London under the usual shabby circumstances. For the first scene in the gloomy Borkman house, a faded, soiled, dusty wreck of some gay French salon, originally designed, perhaps for Offenbach's Favart, was fitted with an incongruous Norwegian stove, a painted staircase, and a couple of chairs which were no doubt white and gold when they first figured in Tom Taylor's Plot and Passion [Olympic, 1853] or some other relic of the days before Mr Bancroft

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<sup>1</sup>Gielgud, 1980, p. 55.

revolutionized stage furniture....In Act II, the gallery in which Borkman prowls for eight years like a wolf was no gallery at all but a square box ugly to loathsomeness.<sup>1</sup>

It is possible that these shabby indoor settings were deliberately used to reinforce the image of the Borkmans' fall in a way that mere realistic depiction could not. It is possible that they represent a half-realized attempt at selective realism as commonly employed nowadays. It is also possible -- and this was Shaw's opinion -- that these faded relics pulled from the Strand's stock were the best Vernon could afford.

For the last act, however, Vernon commissioned two new backcloths and a set of borders, but by late Victorian standards this well-meant attention was more annoying because of its obvious poverty than it was illuminating of the text. The first scene conveyed the merest hint of Ibsen's vision of an open courtyard with a flight of stone steps jutting out from the house. Beyond the courtyard, Ibsen calls for a range of steep hills covered in pine trees, and nearer by, on the edge of this forest, smaller trees and undergrowth. The stage and trees are covered with new-fallen snow; the snow also adds to the atmosphere by determining how the actors move around the stage, as well as reflecting the moon's light, ever-changing with the swift passing of clouds overhead. In Shaw's opinion, the N.C.T.'s "tolerable illusion of a snowy pinewood" was "made ridiculous by a bare acre of wooden floor and only one set of wings for the two [scenes]." Even to the 'advanced' audience, the atmospheric lighting could not mask or overcome the

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<sup>1</sup>G.B. Shaw, "John Gabriel Borkman," Saturday Review, May 8, 1897. rpt. OTN, Vol. 3, p. 122.

deficiency of the stage illusion, and this was even more embarrassing in the second scene of Act IV, a mere "midnight mountain with proper accessories."<sup>1</sup> Ibsen calls for a full-fledged transformation scene or moving panorama to mark Ella's and Borkman's journey:

They have gradually moved in among the trees, left. Little by little they are lost to sight. The house and the courtyard disappear. The landscape, with slopes and ridges, slowly changes and grows wilder and wilder.

Their voices are heard from within the forest (on the right of the stage), then higher up, then on the new edge of the forest (stage left).

They have arrived at a small clearing high up in the forest. The mountain side rises steeply behind them. To the left, far below, the landscape stretches into the distance, with fjords and distant massed peaks. On the left of the clearing is a dead pine tree with a bench under it. The snow lies deep on the clearing.<sup>2</sup>

Here, Ibsen represents symbolic action through the conventions of extravaganza and spectacle, and in the Norwegian premiere (underwritten by the state), a moving backcloth accompanied the old lovers' journey up the mountain.<sup>3</sup> When Martin-Harvey and Robins went into the forest, however, the action stopped, the curtain was lowered, and in an interval of a few minutes a mountainous backcloth was substituted for the earlier scenery.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup>Oxford Ibsen, Vol. 8, (London: Oxford U.P., 1977), pp. 229, 230.

<sup>3</sup>John Northam, Ibsen's Dramatic Method (London: Faber, 1953), p. 206 (n.).

<sup>4</sup> See John Gabriel Borkman programmes in the Fales Library.

The N.C.T.'s unremarkable staging of this transformation deprived the play of theatricality; because the deficient scenery failed to pictorially represent the symbolic action, the poetic undertones that made the play so moving to nineteenth-century readers were rarely noticed in reviews of the performance. But of course Ibsen was not expected to be visually sensational, so the reason for the play's flatness was not identified. Instead, critics tended to blame the restrained acting, inaudible speech, or atmospheric lighting for their disappointment.

The N.C.T.'s audience was mainly sympathetic to Ibsen, but because their appreciation of his style was based on earlier plays, they expected John Gabriel Borkman to be talky and polemical, or at worst an incomprehensible jumble of symbols. They were surprised on both counts. There did not seem to be a social argument, nor did it seem particularly symbolic. Ibsen's technique had changed again -- but to what? When the epilogue play, When We Dead Awaken, was produced by the Stage Society in 1903, Ibsenites were even more disillusioned and disappointed. The ideas in the play were elusive, the language seemed stilted, the characters were abstract and unrecognizable, the acting was unremarkable, and the scenery was nonexistent. The play's 'untheatricality' was reinforced by a representation that was more like a reading than a performance.<sup>1</sup> Without the scenic and lighting

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<sup>1</sup>In letters to Max Beerbohm and Gilbert Murray, Shaw described the conditions under which the Stage Society operated at this time as hurried and haphazard. "It cant afford to pay its performers or to have scenic rehearsals. It begins rehearsing after a fortnight of applications & refusals, with an incomplete cast, and with performers of whom some ...wont go through with it..." (Shaw to Murray, March 15, 1901, in

elements described in the text, When We Dead Awaken was unimpressive, and critics renewed the deprecatory criticism of 1889 and 1891; unable to recognize anything new or remarkable in a platform enactment of an intrinsically spectacular play, and not realizing just what was missing, they once again branded Ibsen as an immoral anarchist, incompetent in the techniques of playwriting.

### Lingering Anti-Ibsenism and Neo-Anti-Ibsenism

After the production of John Gabriel Borkman, and to a much greater extent after When We Dead Awaken, some critics insisted that the truth must be asserted, despite the dominant pro-Ibsen sentiment or the over-tolerance of those who judge literature. According to the English notion of what Ibsen represented and how he expressed it, John Gabriel Borkman and When We Dead Awaken were infinitely inferior to his 'best' plays, and showed failing powers. In performance, When We Dead Awaken was judged to be pessimistic, the 'hero' (if he must be called that) was uninteresting, and the plot lacked action. What story there was struck most critics as incoherent, ineffectual, and even absurd. It was hinted that the obscure, dull, and far-fetched symbolism was a parody of Ibsen's own technique, and even if it was a little bit

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 Laurence, 1972, pp. 221-2.) "The plays are rehearsed for a few days, the casts seldom complete until a few hours before the curtain goes up." If it succeeds, it is due to the "mere hysteria & excitement of the first attempt." (Shaw to Beerbohm, December 30, 1900, in Laurence, 1972, p. 215.) This is distinct contrast to Mary Jane Watson's description of Stage Society productions as characterized by superb acting and artistic productions. See "The Growth of an Independent Theatre Movement in London, 1891-1914," M.Litt. Diss., Bristol, 1970, p. 46.

interesting, it was not Ibsen at his best. Ibsen's faithful but depraved public, consisting of "Socialists, vegetarians, Pro-Boers, bromide-drinkers, ego-maniacs, solitaries and superfluous women,"<sup>1</sup> could only be accounted for if they were dirty-minded misfits in search of thrills. Therefore, like the first Ghosts audience, they revelled in the sensuous animalism of Ulfheim and the frank discussions between Rubek and Irene.

Some critics, by the late 90s, had come to admire the social and reformist plays that preceded Hedda Gabler, while others decried the whole canon (except, in a few instances, Brand, Peer Gynt, or The Pretenders).<sup>2</sup> In this latter group, the accusations were the same as in earlier years: Ibsen was pessimistic, joyless, atheistic, incapable of drawing character, neurotic, distorting of humanity, desirous of shock, and clever but dirty-minded. In a well-known variation on this theme, Max Nordau added a new term, "degenerate," to describe Ibsen's chaotic thought, immoral 'modernity,' mysticism, and ego-mania. The publication of the translation of Degeneration (Entartung) coincided with the Wilde trials, which probably boosted Nordau's sales and certainly encouraged the revival of reaction against 'advanced' literature.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Ibsen's Last Play," Era, January 31, 1903, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, the open letter to William Archer in "The Round Table," Theatre, July 1, 1897, p. 7, or Leatham, 1915, pp. 3-4 (rpts. from the Gateway of 1912).

<sup>3</sup>Max Nordau, Degeneration (London: Heinemann, 1895). The book was widely reviewed, and inspired a book-length refutation: [A.E. Hake], Regeneration, A Reply to Max Nordau (London: Constable, 1895). See the chapter on "The Real Ibsen," pp. 136-87. In England, Ibsen's 'degeneracy' had already been praised in an anonymous article, "Ibsen and the Morbid Taint," Belgravia, January 1894, pp. 59-65. The author,



Clement Scott's attitude during these years was blatantly self-contradictory. In The Drama of Yesterday and Today, he makes an open confession of his failure to preserve "the stage for the people":

We are living to-day in a period of transition, in a time when customs are changed, when manners are not so formal, when faith is not so pronounced or alluring, and when the love of what is beautiful, and ennobling, and true, is not so absolute in the hearts of men and women. The stage, with its searching mirror, cannot afford to neglect the study of these things....

The Ibsen reaction, with its unloveliness, its want of faith; its hopeless, despairing creed; its worship of the ugly in art; its grim and repulsive reality, regret it as we will, is a solemn and resistless fact. At the outset, some of us, conscientiously and in the interests of the art we loved and had followed with such persistency, tried to laugh it out of court. But the time came when the laugh was on the other side. I own it; I admit it.<sup>1</sup>

In the Blathwayt Great Thoughts interview of the year before, however, Scott asserts that Ibsen fails because his atheism revolts the Great British Public in the pit and gallery:

Ibsen fails because he is...an atheist, and has not realised what the great backbone of religion means to the English race. He fails, because his plays are nasty, dirty, impure,

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probably a woman, argues that Ibsen fulfills the need for darkness and gloom in a society overwhelmed with light and joyfulness in art and matter-of-fact business in everyday life. The risqué passages attract some people, but the main reason his plays appeal is because they "now serve the purpose of the old-fashioned Communion Service, allowing us to study the tortures of the damned, and appease 'the moral taint,' and are thereby useful and instructive. Degeneration was available by April 1895 (the date of the Bookman review); Wilde's trials began on April 3, and sentencing took place on May 26. Samuel Hynes pointed out that performances of Wilde's plays ceased soon after, "but so, in a general way, did those of 'advanced' plays. It was as though the Victorian age, in its last years, had determined to be relentlessly Victorian while it could." The Edwardian Turn of Mind (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1968), p. 185.  
<sup>1</sup>Clement Scott, The Drama of Yesterday and To-day (London: MacMillan, 1899), p. x.

clever if you like, but foul to the last degree, and healthy-minded English people don't like to stand and sniff over an ash-pit.<sup>1</sup>

His prophecy was that unless the stage became once again aligned with human nature, and dramatists became disentangled with "the trail of the Ibsen serpent," audiences would abandon the theatre for the variety halls, "where all who appear there are hard-working, earnest in their study, and try their very utmost to do their best for their employers and the vast audiences which believe in them."<sup>2</sup> This prophecy, made in 1899, was increasingly fulfilled in the years leading up to 1914.

#### Qualitative Ibsenism

Scott and Nordau both admired Ibsen the Poet,<sup>3</sup> but regretted that he did not always reflect human truths. It is significant that they, and others like them, admired some of the old-fashioned touches in the social plays (e.g. Nora's romping with her children, Mrs. Alving's 'realization' scene and cry of "Ghosts!," and Madame Helseth's poignant witnessing of the double suicide in Rosmersholm). Repeatedly, critics expressed approval of such touches. What they were really prizing, however, were resemblances to conventional melodramatic devices. This 'qualitative Ibsenism' was granted if and only if Ibsen obeyed the traditions of playwriting and provided recognizable signs that could be straightforwardly interpreted on the stage. Thus, within A Doll's

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<sup>1</sup>Blathwayt, 1898, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Constance Margaret Scott quoting her husband in Old Days in Bohemian London (London: Hutchinson, 1919), pp. 269, 270.

<sup>3</sup>See Nordau, 1895, pp. 338-41.

House and Ghosts one finds "mini-melodramas of defeat" in the hereditary syphilis of Dr. Rank and Oswald, and in An Enemy of the People the message of political protest and moral absolutism is in an undeniably melodramatic framework.<sup>1</sup> Nora's enlightened departure from the doll's house follows a chain of melodramatic scenarios: wishing to spare the hero but suffering under the villain's threat of revealing her secret, she contemplates suicide by drowning; confident in the basis of romantic love, she expects "the miracle" to save her from the villain's intrigues; Torvald, when informed of the intrigues, takes fright then draws up a plan for new living arrangements, but he is "saved" and so forgives. There is also a hint of the scenario of the outcast woman trudging alone in the snow, possibly descending from the high life of her cosy home to the low life of the city, or else making her way back to her native village. She asserts that she is a human being, and steps from the two dimensional world of melodrama to the third dimension of realism, but even though she is "no longer prepared to accept what people say and what's written in books," her literal snowy wanderings are going to be on a well-trod path. The intrigues of the red-headed, showily dressed adventuress Hedda are also suggestive of many melodramatic scenarios, as is the dissipated past of Lovborg, who succumbed to the evil temptations of drink and women, but returns to the city a reformed man, only to be utterly ruined by a heartless woman who tempts and taunts him. In Ghosts, many of the melodramatic situations are complete in the action of the past, like Mrs. Alving's night of transgression, the public face and private truth of the Captain's degeneracy, Joanna's story, and Oswald's life in

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<sup>1</sup>See James L. Smith, Melodrama (London: Methuen, 1973), pp. 66, 72-3.

Paris. These situations provide the exposition, the precipitating action, and the evidence for the 'hereditary' argument, but they are nevertheless couched in the language of melodrama. During the course of the play, one wonders whether Oswald is succumbing to the Demon Drink, and Ibsen teases audiences with the disastrous (offstage) fire "and uninsured too!"

These plays also distort and replace melodramatic conventions, but they were sufficiently literary and tragic to get away with it. Persistent touting of their merits changed traditions and expectations, and their comparatively moderate bending of the rules became acceptable.

Thus, by the late 90s, some of Ibsen's former 'failings' had been turned into virtues. His subordination of plot to character, slow-moving action, complicated motives, and lack of clarity in conduct and ethics depicted a more plausible world than the melodrama, but it was soon adopted by the commercial stage. Depending on one's views, Justice and Right might not triumph in the endings, and this was depressing, but the rising popularity of socialist ethics, feminism, and moral responsibility in the early 90s, and Ibsen's power to convince won many sympathizers. By the late 90s, An Enemy of the People and The Pillars of Society could be admired for their "grim continuity, and fierce, sustained intensity."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>'Momus,' "Plays and Players. 'John Gabriel Borkman' at the Strand," Gentlewoman, May 15, 1897, p. 683.

As a rule, [Ibsen's] studies in nature, though trenching on the abnormal, are wonderfully penetrating and keen, and he lays bare the workings of the human heart with pitiless truth and severity. Not for him is the conventional side of life, with its pleasing hollowness and affectations. He has recognised that in every man there are two opposing forces, that we are, one and all, duplications of the Jekyll and Hyde type, and it is the more sinister side of our natures that he delights to paint in vivid and life-like colours. His studies in heredity and illicit passion have revealed a masterly power of diagnosis, and his 'Doll's House' and 'Rosmersholm', to take two notable examples, are as relentless in their purpose as a Greek tragedy.<sup>1</sup>

But this elemental struggle between Good and Evil, so central to melodrama, seemed to be missing in When We Dead Awaken and John Gabriel Borkman, and the confusion of admirable and villainous characteristics apparent in Nora, Krogstad, Mrs. Alving, or Thea Elvsted was no longer distinguishable. The admiration that Ibsen engendered -- and this is a cardinal point -- was not so much for the far-seeing experiments in his last plays as his clever manipulation and re-working of the conventions of the well-made play and melodrama in his polemical plays. Where it was no longer possible to analyze the clever treatment of recognizable devices, Ibsenite converts faltered and even William Archer lost faith in the playwright's genius.

By the late 90s, it was interesting to see how the 'tricks' of artifice and theatricality could be avoided and even replaced with more profoundly moving techniques. But when Ibsen abandoned preaching (which was the English way of saying that he failed to provide the audience with his view of the characters and conclusions about their goodness or badness) he was once again immoral and unstageworthy.

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<sup>1</sup>"Ibsen's New Play," Morning Advertiser, May 4, 1897, p. 5.

Compared to Rosmersholm or A Doll's House, the final trio lack regularly spaced intervals of dramatic incident, and consequently these plays were considered dull. Once again, the endings of the last plays were criticized, but not because of the social action they propounded: the lack of idealistic outcomes branded Ibsen a pessimist, while his refusal to 'finish' plots and conclude situations with a proper dispensation of 'dream justice' made him a bungler.<sup>1</sup>

When it was first produced, the situation and characters of The Lady from the Sea were often likened to entertainments at the Surrey, Coburg, and Victoria, but devoid of pictorial spectacle, passionate acting, and the rumbling pace of melodrama, it fell flat. The first act of Little Eyolf thrilled, and no wonder: it contains the standard plot, structure, characters, and situation of melodrama. The tragic wish fulfillment of a frustrated wife is brought about by an eerie figure of divine retribution, and the floating crutch creates an image as haunting as Mathias' bells. The ensuing acts, however, were a dreadful anticlimax --like two hours of resolving action eventually resulting in a marital tableau which, by then, was soured with pessimism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Michael R. Booth, English Melodrama (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), pp. 13-15.

<sup>2</sup>Ibsen's failure to provide an idealistic outcome made him a pessimist. Even though Edward Russell wondered whether Rita and Alfred were reconciled in order to fulfill public expectations of a happy ending, and if Ibsen had compromised himself, he wrote that "played with due inspiration, the scene must produce in any audience deep interest, though that interest will be unattended with any conviction that husband and wife will live happily ever afterwards." Russell compared this with Asta's decision to unite with a man she only half loves: "this is just what would be likely to happen in real life amid general applause." Russell and Standing, 1897, pp. 71-2, and 74.

In John Gabriel Borkman the crime drama is long past, unlike the machinations of that other Ibsen schemer, Nora Helmer. The competition between two semi-villainous women for the love of Erhart seemed somehow 'wrong' -- their sentiments belonged to young adventuresses, not to an embittered matron and dying spinster. Even Ella's love for Borkman was 'wrong': "It is hard to arouse interest in a grey-haired lady, who after so long an interval is found still suffering so acutely from the pangs of despised love that she addresses her quondam admirer when he is near his death in the good old fashion of heroines of melodrama."<sup>1</sup> Borkman succumbs to sin and dies of it, but he cheats the audience of his painful demise, saying that he died years ago, and quietly slips away, seemingly without giving meaning or justice to his death. By melodramatic standards, John Gabriel Borkman is absurd.

Some of the scenic conventions of When We Dead Awaken have already been mentioned. It also calls for a real stream with real water, a real snowstorm, avalanche, and breaking of the dawn. The expository scenarios, however, are unrecognizable: Rubek is not a Pygmalion giving life to his sculpture, but a conscienceless murderer of a soul, and though Maja's engagement to him touches on the happy fate of a fairy princess, her married life suggests only ennui, quite without incident. After she left Rubek, Irene travelled in many lands, posing on a revolving pedestal in variety halls and naked in peep shows. As if this degradation was not sufficient for his white-clad heroine, Ibsen also has her descend into madness and perhaps death: "I was dead

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<sup>1</sup>"The Theatres. 'John Gabriel Borkman,'" Graphic, May 8, 1897, p. 571.

The Ibsen Legend

When English critics thought they had discerned the significance of Ibsen's technique, and when his imitators had made it obvious that the Master could not be bettered, his plays of 1877-91 were somehow vindicated. Just as, in the 1950s, Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov, and Pinter were at first greeted with hostility because they broke dramatic rules, Ibsen was denounced and could not be classified by type. As Keir Elam points out, new rules are constantly being laid out, but

Every time...we are able to account for a new dramatic or theatrical experience only in very imprecise terms ('bizarre', 'experimental', 'avant-garde', et.), either through ignorance of the specific general rules in force or because they scarcely exist, we are applying a loose subcode produced by undercoding.<sup>1</sup>

In Ibsen's time, melodramatic codes were so entrenched that even the classics were revamped to conform to their conventions, as were plays of the 'modern society' genre popularized by Pinero, Jones, Grundy, and Haddon Chambers. Ibsen presented a strange alternative: he was from Norway (not England, France, or Germany, where plays were 'supposed' to come from), he was a poet as well as a playwright, and his texts were (almost from the beginning) treated like inviolate, sacred scriptures. Just as Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter, etc. became collectively known as 'playwrights of the absurd,' a new genre of 'Ibsen plays' and the New Drama was identified in the early 1890s. In his final plays, however, Ibsen seemed to fail at his own game.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid, pp. 54-5.



The 'dramatic revolution' and renaissance predicted by the early Ibsenites did not come about, but that did not prevent them from claiming an absolute victory. Their non-Ibsenite counterparts pointed out the supremacy of escapist entertainments, the popularity of traditional playwrights, and Ibsen's failing (then, after 1899) defunct output. As long as he was not popular, they wrote, he could not be regarded as absolutely successful. As long as he was uncontroversial he was not an iconoclast, and as long as his last plays were misunderstood, he could not seem to have revolutionized anything.

By the time of Ibsen's death in 1906, it was safe for old anti-Ibsenites to resurrect obsolete malediction, and obituary notices actually denied the importance of the great debate of 1891-93.

Balanced against the predictably laudatory memorials of Archer, Grein, Wicksteed, Beerbohm, and Shaw<sup>1</sup> are a few articles that completely deny Ibsen's power for good and his lasting influence in England. The Referee and Free Lance (edited by Clement Scott until 1904) attribute the origin of the problem play to The Second Mrs. Tanqueray, or perhaps Dumas, but certainly not Ibsen. The apotheosis of musical comedy is a frequent refrain: "If Ibsen remodelled the English stage, as is alleged in his favour, all I can say is that Ibsen must have

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<sup>1</sup>See: W. Archer, "Henrik Ibsen. An Appreciation of the Great Norwegian," Daily Chronicle, May 24, 1906, p. 6, and "Ibsen and English Criticism -- The Old Guard of Anti-Ibsenism -- A Victory all Along the Line," Tribune, June 2, 1906, p. 2; J.T. Grein, "Henrik Ibsen. A Tribute," Sunday Times, May 27, 1906, p. 4; P.H. Wicksteed, "Henrik Ibsen. 1828-1906," Inquirer, June 2, 1906, pp. 363-4; Max Beerbohm, "Ibsen," Saturday Review, May 26, 1906, rpt. Around Theatres (1924) (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1953), pp. 432-6, and Egan, 1972, pp. 443-6; G.B. Shaw, "Ibsen," Clarion, June 1, 1906, rpt. Wisenthal, 1979, pp. 239-45.

invented musical comedy, for there is no other drama nowadays."<sup>1</sup> In 1928, when at least two generations of new playwrights had had the opportunity to display Ibsen's influence upon them, Ibsen was pictured in front of an array of theatre posters, all advertising "crime" and "crook" dramas. The caption, which reads "And all this in honour of my centenary!"<sup>2</sup> shows that his importance was still overlooked by the majority of playgoers, who never ventured into a private or suburban playhouse.

There were a few pessimistic Ibsenites, even in 1906.

St. John Hankin complained that although the other fine arts had progressed since the early 90s, drama had not.

The English Theatre has not moved at all....The Court Theatre has just given a few tentative matinees of Hedda Gabler. Miss Robins was doing the same fifteen years ago. At the St. James's Mr. Pinero has replaced Mrs. Tanqueray with His House in Order -- not exactly progress. The Stage Society is merely the Independent Theatre in a new incarnation. Musical comedy is still the mainstay of most successful managements.<sup>3</sup>

Hankin's point is valid. A mass audience simply had not been generated. Beyond the Stage Society, few managers dared professional productions of Ibsen or his followers and little headway had been made to establish a popular yet serious drama. A limited audience meant limited runs, usually only of one or two performances. The longest-

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<sup>1</sup>Free Lance, June 2, 1906, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Punch, March 28, 1928. See Appendix D.

<sup>3</sup>St. John Hankin, "Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critics..." The Dramatic Works of St. John Hankin, Vol. 3 (London: Martin, Secker, 1912), p. 167.

running Ibsen production since the turn of the century was Terry's Vikings -- Stella Campbell's celebrated Hedda Gabler was seen at only seven matinees. Compared to this record, Achurch's premiere of A Doll's House and Robins' Hedda Gabler, Master Builder, and Little Eyolf were long-lived.

Ibsen's influence, it was noted, was much greater on the Continent. Perhaps the Academy was right in saying that in England it was too early to judge Ibsen's influence:

He has few imitators, he has left no school. Only in the general broadening of the outlook, the inculcation of ideas, the fearless pursuit and representation of truth, is it possible for us to-day to trace the effect of the works of one of the most remarkable men in all the history of literature.<sup>1</sup>

This, after all, was Ibsen's modest aim. An iconoclast to the end, Ibsen was selectively admired even by his most ardent opponents, and even during the period of greatest controversy, the Ibsen Year of 1891. The signifying systems of his social plays were at first difficult for English critics and audiences to recognize, and when faithfully interpreted (i.e. not just reduced to their melodramatic precedents) not everyone could grasp the innovations in technique, genre, and subject. In a matter of years, these new systems were imprinted on other, truly popular, plays and A Doll's House, An Enemy of the People, Hedda Gabler, etc. were widely admired. It took much longer for the new, more unorthodox encodings of The Master Builder, John Gabriel Borkman, and When We Dead Awaken to be recognized -- longer than the period under consideration in this study. The years of toil and

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<sup>1</sup>Academy, May 26, 1906, p. 501, rpt. Egan, 1972, pp. 442-3.

argument precipitated by the Ibsenite elect had an indelible effect, but even the most faithful admirers were puzzled by scenographic and other aesthetic elements of the later plays. Furthermore, they tended to admire Ibsen for his earlier work as a social realist and adaptor of prevalent forms; their expectations went unfulfilled and they simply could not produce or evoke meaning in readings or productions. In such a setting, controversy could no longer flourish. It was left to yet another generation of 'new critics' to analyze the new New Drama of Ibsen's last phase.

APPENDIX A.  
CHRONOLOGY OF IBSEN-RELATED EVENTS  
1872-1906

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1872-9										
1878	March			Coase writes 12 articles for English periodicals, plus at least 10 short notices						
1880	December	15 (mat.)		Archer's first article on Ibsen is publ. QUICKSANDS, or THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY		Gaiety	Consul Bernick Sansted Astrup Nilsen Johan Hessel Hilman Hessel Dr. Borch Krupp Hansen Olaf Mrs. Bernick Martha Lona Hessel Dina Dorf	Trans. and adapted by William Archer	Director - W.H. Vernon	
1882				H.F. Lord's trans. of NORA is publ.						
1884	March	3-28 (23 perfs.)		BREAKING A BUTTERFLY		Prince's	Humphrey Goddard Philip Dunkley Martin Grittle Dan Bradbury Flora Goddard Mrs. Goddard Maid Agnes Goddard	Adapted by Henry Arthur Jones and Henry Herman	Musical Director - C.J. Hargitt, Stage Manager - G.W. Anson	Billed with THE MARBLE ARCH, by Garraway and Rose
1885	July	28		Edward Aveling reads GHOSTS to Olive Schreiner						
	January	15		Private reading of A DOLL'S HOUSE			Nora Torvald Krogstad Mrs. Linde	Trans. H.F. Lord		
				H.F. Lord's trans. of GHOSTS publ. in To-Day			Eleanor Marx Aveling Edward Aveling Bernard Shaw May Morris	Trans. H.F. Lord		
	March	25 or 26		NORA (A DOLL'S HOUSE) (Anataurs)		School of Dramatic Art. A hall in Argyle Street.	Torvald Helmer Nora Dr. Rank Mrs. Linden Krogstad Ellen	Trans. H.F. Lord	Scribblers Dramatic Society. Charity performance for the Society for the prevention of Cruelty to Children.	SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL also performed
	November or December			Private reading of GHOSTS by Eleanor Marx Aveling and Edward Aveling to Olive Schreiner			Mr. Addison Maud Kennedy Maurice Symes Edith Kennedy S.J. Wynn-Mackenzie Miss Saunders			

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR / TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1888	?	?		Philip Wicksteeds lectures on Ibsen (series of 4 lectures)		Orchestra Town Hall				
	(spring)			William Archer gives a lecture on Ibsen		Royal Institution				
	August			Camelot volume publ. by Walter Scott. Includes THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY (trans. William Archer), GHOSTS (trans. H.F. Lord), AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE (trans. Eleanor Marx Aveling). Edited by Havelock Ellis.						
	January			Cosse's "Ibsen's Social Dramas" publ. in <u>Fortnightly Review</u>						
1889	February			F. Sharp's anti-Ibsen article appears in the <u>Theatre</u>						
	June	7-29 (27 perfs.)		A DOLL'S HOUSE (professional premiere)		Novelty	Torvald Helmer Nora Dr. Rank Mrs. Linden Nils Krogstad Anna Ellen Emmy Bob Einar Porter	Trans. William Archer  Herbert Waring Janet Achurch Charles Charrington Gertrude Warden Royce Carleton Blanche Eversleigh Mabel K. Haynes Amy Rayner Ethel Rayner Lionel Calhaem J. Luke	Director - C. Charrington, Asst. Stage Manager - D.D. Betterton, Business Mgr. - Harrington Bailly, Perruquier - C.H. Fox, Conductor - W.C. Lamartine, Lessees - L. & H. Nathan	
	Late June			Beringer and another management team consider producing GHOSTS						
1890	July	17 (mat.)		THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY		Opera Comique	Consul Bernick Mrs. Betty Bernick Olaf Bernick Martha Bernick Johan Tonnesen Lona Hessel Hilmar Tonnesen Rorlund Rummel Vigeland Sandstad Dina Dorf Krap Aune Mrs. Rummel Mrs. Holt Mrs. Lyng Hilda Rummel Netta Holt Townspesople	W.H. Vernon Mrs. Daves Vera Beringer Elizabeth Robins J.G. Grahame Genevieve Ward E. Hendrie John Beauchamp E. Smart E. Giradot Mr. Branscombe Annie Irish G. Canninge A. Wood Fanny Robertson Miss St. Ange M.A. Gifford May Beringer Miss Braekstad	Benefit for Vera Beringer. Arranged by Mrs. Beringer (novelist and playwright)	Followed by Mrs. Kendal's recitation of "Ostler Joe" and Antoinette Starling's rendition of the song "The Three Fishers"

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1889	October			L.N. Parker's trans. of ROSMERSHOLM publ.						
	December			William Archer's trans. of A DOLL'S HOUSE (Novelty Theatre edition) publ.						
1889/90	December or January			E. Marx Aveling's trans. of THE LADY FROM THE SEA publ.						
1890	January			First volume of IBSSEN'S PROSE DRAMAS publ. (Walter Scott) Edited by William Archer						
	February			Walter Besant's 'The Doll's House — and After' publ. in <u>English Illustrated Magazine</u>						
	March			G.B. Shaw's sequel "Still After the Doll's House" publ. in <u>Time</u>						
	March			H.F. Lord's revised edition of A DOLL'S HOUSE publ.						
	March or April			Second volume of IBSSEN'S PROSE DRAMAS						
	May and June			H.L. Brækstad tries to produce GHOSTS						
	June	19 (mat.)		Reading of AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE		Haymarket	Mrs. Erving Winslow	Trans. Eleanor Marx Aveling		389 London Ethical Society
		22		Lecture by J.H. Muirhead on "Ibsen's Plays and Problems"		Essex Hall, the Strand				
	July	8 (mat.)		Reading of A DOLL'S HOUSE		Stairway Hall	Mrs. Erving Winslow	Trans. H.F. Lord		
		11 (mat.)		Reading of THE LADY FROM THE SEA		Stairway Hall	Mrs. Erving Winslow	Trans. Eleanor Marx Aveling		
		15		First edition of Havelock Ellis' <u>The New Spirit</u> publ.						
		18		G.B. Shaw Lectures on Ibsen to the Fabian Society		St. James Restaurant				
	ca. 18-21			J.T. Grein announces that an independent theatre society will be inaugurated in September or October						Later developed into <u>The Quintessence of Ibsenism</u>
	July or August			Third volume of IBSSEN'S PROSE DRAMAS						
	October			Marion Lea considers producing THE LADY FROM THE SEA, and Alma Murray considers ROSMERSHOLM						
		18		G.B. Shaw lectures on Ibsen to the Church and Stage Guild		31 Upper Bedford Place				



YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1890	November	24	Fourth volume of IBSSEN'S PROSE DRAMAS publ. Henrik Jaeger's <u>Life of Henrik Ibsen</u> trans.			Theatre Royal, Edinburgh	Torvald Helmer Nora Dr. Rank Mrs. Lindan Nils Krogstad	Trans. William Archer	Benefit for the Scottish Masonic Benevolent Fund, given under the auspices of the Dramatic and Arts Lodge of Freemasons	Preceded by the ozaretta A BROKEN COUPLING, by Peacock and Moonie
			A DOLL'S HOUSE							
			Third Cossa's trans. of HEDDA GABLER is publ. by Heinemann							
			William Archer's trans. of HEDDA GABLER is publ. by Walter Scott							
1891	January	27 (nat.)	A DOLL'S HOUSE			Terry's	Torvald Helmer Nora Dr. Rank Mrs. Lindan Nils Krogstad Anna Ellen Emmie Einarr Porter	Trans. William Archer	Proprietor and Manager - Edward Terry, Musical Director - J. Bayliss, Stage Manager - Fitzroy Morgan, Business Managers - C. St. John Denton (for Fraser) and H.T. Brickwell (for Terry)	
			Lily Langtry announces that she will produce HEDDA GABLER (cancelled by Feb. 12)							
			Wilson Barrett proposes a production of THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY (still forthcoming in early May)							
	February	ca. 6	J.H. McCarthy and Charles Colnaghi announce a production of HEDDA GABLER in their Free Theatre			Olympic	Bernick Dina Dorf	Trans. Charles Archer		
			CHSIS read before the Playgoers' Club							
			Paper on Ibsen's plays given to the Playgoers' Club by Edward Aveling							
	February 23 (nat.) and March 5 (nat.)		ROSTERHOLM			Vauxville	Johannes Rosmer Rebecca West Rector Kroll Ulric Brendel Peter Mortensgard Madame Holseth	Trans. Charles Archer		
			BRAND published by Methuen, in a translation by William Wilson							

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR / TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1891	February	23	Discussion on ROSMERSHOLM at Playgoers' Club							
	March		Marie Fraser contemplates producing THE WILD DUCK and THE LADY FROM THE SEA (dress rehearsal)							
		11 13	GHOSTS (performance)			Royalty Theatre Dean Street	Mrs. Alving Oswald Alving Pastor Manders Jacob Engstrand Regina	Alice Wright Frank Lindo Leonard Outram Sydney Howard Edith Kenward	Trans. William Archer	Independent Theatre Society. Lessee - Kate Santley, Manager and Founder - J.T. Grein, Musical Director - Jan Mulder Business Manager - Frank Lindo, Acting Manager - Charles Hoppe, Penruquier and Costumier - C.H. Rox, Furnishings - J.S. Lyon
		14	"Rosmer's Home, Sweet Home!" publ. in Black and White							
		?	ROSMER OF ROSMERSHOLM, by Austin Fryers, publ.							
		16	G.B. Shaw begins to prepare The Quintessence of Ibsenism for publication							
	March 21 - June 6		Parodies of A DOLL'S HOUSE, ROSMERSHOLM, HEDDA GABLER and THE WILD DUCK, by F. Arsteg, appear in Punch							
	April 16 and June 18		A PAIR OF GHOSTS (AFTER ISEN) (2 scenes)			Steinway Hall	Flossie Speckleton	Rose Kennedy		
	April 20-24 (mats.) and April 27-May 1 (mats.), then May 4-30 (eves. with Saturday mats.)		HEDDA GABLER			Vaudeville	George Tesman Hedda Juliana Tesman Mrs. Elvsted Judge Brack Ejlert Lovborg Bertha	W. Scott Buist Elizabeth Robins Henrietta Cowen Marion Lea Charles Sugden Arthur Elwood Patty Chapman	Producers - Elizabeth Robins and Marion Lea, Lessee and Manager - Thomas Thorne, Acting Manager - Sydney Alport, Stage Managers - George R. Foss / Fred Thorne, Musical Director - Charles Dubois	Replaced MONEY in the evening bill
	April	27	Wilton Jones reads the Ibsen and naturalistic parody "One Day in a Woman's Life" at the Playgoers' Club							
	May	4	A visit to London by Ibsen is rumoured							
			Edward Aveling lectures on THE LADY FROM THE SEA to the Playgoers' Club							
		11-15 (mats.)	THE LADY FROM THE SEA			Terry's	Dr. Wangel Ellida Wangel Bolette Hilde Arnholm Lyngstrand Ballested A Stranger	Oscar Adye Rose Mellor Violet Armbruster Edith Kenward Leonard Outram Herbert Sparling Ernest H. Patterson Charles Dalton	Trans. Eleanor Marx Aveling	Director - 'Alec Nelson' (Edward Aveling), Proprietor and Manager - H.T. Brickwell, Stage Manager - George Bellmore, Musical Director - J. Bayliss, Business Manager - C. St. John Denton

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR / TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1891	May	16	"Mr. Grant Allen at Dinner," imaginary dialogue between Allen and Hedda Gabler, published in the <u>Speaker</u>			Strand	Hedda Ibsen			
		ca. 17	parody of HEDDA GABLER contemplated			Toole's	George Tesman (an idiot) Peter Terence (Thea's Grand Papa) Thea Tesman (George's wife for the present) Delia Terence (Peter's Doll)	Author J.M. Barrie	Lessee and Manager - J.L. Toole, Stage Manager - John Billington, Business Manager - George Lee, Perruquier - C.H. Fox	Billed with H.J. Byron's CHARLES, or A FOOL AND HIS MONEY (to June 5) then THE SERIOUS FAMILY. ICI ON (NE) PARLE FRANCAIS added June 13
	May	30 - June 27 (27 perf. with mats. May 30, June 13, 20. No perf. June 6)	IRENEN'S GHOST: or TOOLE UP TO DATE (afterpiece)				Torvald Helmer Mora Dr. Rank Mrs. Linden Nils Krogstad Anna Ivar Emmie Maid-servant Porter	Trans. William Archer	Lessee and Manager - Charles Wyndham, Business Manager - Arthur Bladenore, Choreographer - John d'Auban, Director - Emilie Leicester, Musical Director - Theodore Ward	
	June	2 (mat.)	A DOLL'S HOUSE			Criterion	Frank Rodney Rose Norreys W.L. Abingdon Lucia Harwood Charles J. Fulton E.H. Brooke Eric Field-Fisher Caryl Field-Fisher Miss Brooke Mr. Brooke			
		2-5, and 9	THE GIFTED LADY			Avenue	Charles Dangleton Dr. Plainchat Algernon Wormwood Vitus Dance Vergris Biler Cabman Badalia Dangleton Felicia Strangeways Amelia	Author Robert Buchanan	Lessee and Manager - Henry Lee, Musical Director - Thomas Batty, Stage Manager - William Sidney, Business Manager - Arthur Yates, Perruquier - C.H. Fox	Preceded by T.H. Campbell's THE VIPER ON THE HEARTH
		18	Scene from HEDDA GABLER performed at the source of Mary Eliza (Mrs. Hugh Reginald) Haweis			Portman Rooms	Hedda Thea George Tesman			
		30	A DOLL'S HOUSE			Crystal Palace	Norreys cast, as above			
	July	16	A DOLL'S HOUSE			Theatre Royal, Brighton	Norreys cast, as above			
	August	ca. 15	Quintessence of Ibsenism completed, ready for publication (not circulated until October)							

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT	PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1891	December	4	Reading of part of <u>FRANK</u> for the Ballroom Society				St. James's Hall				
		6	H.B. Tree's lecture "Interesting Fallacies of the Modern Stage" for the Playgoers' Club				St. James's Hall				
		7	E. Gosse's lecture "Ibsen and his Critics" for the London Institution				Finchbury Circus				
1892	March 22 - May 30		Proceedings of the Select Committee on Theatres and Music Halls								
	April - May		Lea and Robins contemplate matinees of <u>HEIDA GABLER</u> and <u>ROSWERSHOLM</u>								
	April 19 - May 20		A DOLL'S HOUSE				Avenue	Torvald Helmer Nora Dr. Rank Mrs. Linden Nils Krogstad Anna Ellen Emmy Einar Bob Porter	Trans. William Archer	Producers - Janet Achurch and Charles Charrington, Licensee - George Parrot, Manager - Charles Charrington, Scenery - W.T. Hensley, Furnishings - Octavian, Stage Manager - George R. Foss, Business Manager - Harrington Bailly, Conductor - C.W. Lavartine.	Church performed April 19 - May 5, and May 30 - June 1. Murveys performed May 6 - 20, and June 2 - 10.
	Also May 17						Crystal Palace	Rosmer Rector Kroll Dr. West Mortensgard Beata Helseeth Rebecca West	Leonard Outram Henry Vernon Robert Soutar George Hughes/ Austin Melford Frances Ivor Susie Vaughan Estelle Burney	Lessee and Manager - Frederick Langley, Director - Leonard Outram, Costumiers - Stagg and Hantle, Stage Manager - Robert Soutar, Business Manager - Frank Davis, Conductor - John Storer, Scenery - Richard C. Durant. N.B. The Stage of April 14, 1892, announced that H.L. Brakstead [sic] would do the scenery.	Billed with A STAGE ODISH (Frederick de Lara), and THE FLAT OF THE ODDS (Leonard Outram)
	ca. April		<u>Philo Wicksteed's Four Lectures on Ibsen</u> published				Globe		Author Austin Fryers		
1893	May	8	Austin Fryers' lectures to the Playgoers' Club on "A Sidelight of Ibsenism"								
	July or August		William and Charles Archer's translation of <u>PEER GYNT</u> published by Walter Scott								
	October	5	A DOLL'S HOUSE				Theatre Royal, Brighton	Torvald Helmer Nora Dr. Rank Mrs. Linden Nils Krogstad	Thalberg (?) Janet Achurch Charles Charrington (?) Elizabeth Robins Julian Cross	Trans. William Archer	

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR / TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1892	October	6 and 7	HEDDA GABLER			Theatre Royal, Brighton	George Tesman Mrs. Hedda Tesman Mrs. Elvsted Brack Eilert Lovborg	Trans. William Archer and Edmund Gosse		
	December	7 (nom.)	Copyright Performance of BYGMESTER SOLNESS (THE MASTER BUILDER)			Haymarket	Bygmester Solness Aline Herdal Knut Brovik Ragnar Brovik Kaja Fosli Hilde Wangel	Trans. William Archer and Edmund Gosse		A reading in Danish. First perf. in any country. Five days before publ. in Scandinavia.
1893	January	16	William Archer's and E. Gosse's joint translation of THE MASTER BUILDER published by Heinemann							
		26	GHOSTS			Athenaeum (Tottenham Court Road)	Mrs. Alving Oswald Alving Pastor Manders Jacob Engstrand Regina Engstrand	Trans. William Archer	Independent Theatre Society. Director - J.T. Grein, Stage Manager - Hermann Lange	Billed with ROSES OF SHADOW (Andre Raffalovich)
	February	20 - March 3 (10 met. perfs. No perf. Feb. 25)	THE MASTER BUILDER			Trafalgar Square Theatre	Halvard Solness Mrs. Solness Dr. Herdal Knut Brovik Ragnar Brovik Kaja Fosli Hilda Wangel	Trans. William Archer and Edmund Gosse	Producers - Herbert Waring and Elizabeth Robins, Proprietors and Lessees - Mr. and Mrs. Frank Wyatt, Directors - Herbert Waring and Elizabeth Robins, Managers - Yorke Stephens and E.W. Garden, Conductor - Dan Godfrey, Jr., Stage Manager, George R. Foss, Business Managers - Charles Terry and G.H. Bashford, Box Office manager - F.J. Potter, Electrician - Hardman A. Earle, Orchestra Leader - Mr. F. Taylor, Musical Director - Harry Sprake, Acting Manager and Treasurer - L.F. Nethersole	
	March	6 - 25 (21 perfs. Evenings and Saturday mat.)				Vaudeville	Mrs. Solness Dr. Herdal Knut Brovik			At Vaudeville, billed with OUR PLAY (R.G. Graham) March 13 - 18.
	February	23	"Mr. Bilde: A Palpitation in One Act" Parody of THE MASTER BUILDER in the Star							
	March	11 - 25 (14 perfs. with mat. March 18. Mats. only March 11 and 25)	A DOLL'S HOUSE			Royalty	Torvald Helmer Nora Dr. Rank Mrs. Linden Nils Krogstad Anna Ellen Einar Bob Emmy Porter	Trans. William Archer	Lessee - Kate Santley, Manager - Charles Charrington, Scenery - W.T. Helmsley, Musical Director - C.W. Lamartine, Business Manager - Harrington Bally, Stage Manager - John Carter, Secretary - Gifford Stacey, Box Office Manager - Glover	

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT	PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1893	March	30	THE MASTER BUILDER				Theatre Royal, Broughton	Halvard Solness Mrs. Aline Solness Dr. Herdal Knut Brovik Ragnar Brovik Kaia Fosli Hilda Wangel	Herbert Waring Elsie Chester George R. Foss (?) Edward Rochelle Philip Cunningham Marie Linden Elizabeth Robins	Trans. William Archer and Edmund Gosse	
	April				Ibsen Subscription Performances proposed by J.T. Grein and Fred Pollock						
		9			Edward Aveling lectures of theories of Ibsenism and Socialism to the Playgoers' Club						
	May	26			H.B. Tree lectures on Ibsen to the Royal Institution						
		27			Premiere of THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY, by A.W. Pinero		St. James				
	May 29 and 30 (mats.) Also June 5 and 6 (eves.)		HEDDA GABLER				Opera Comique	George Tesman Mrs. Hedda Tesman Miss Juliana Tesman Mrs. Elvsted Judge Brack Eilert Lovborg Bertha	W. Scott Buist Elizabeth Robins Henrietta Cowen Marie Linden Charles Sugden Lewis Waller Florence Hunter	Director - Elizabeth Robins, Lessee - Edward Compton, Acting and Business Manager - Charles Hoppe, Managing Secre- tary - J.T. Grein, Stage Manager - George R. Fosse, Furnishings - Oetzmann, Costumer - Debenhams and Freebody	
	May 31 and June 1 (mats.) Also June 7 and 8 (eves.)		ROSEMERIDIM				Opera Comique	Johannes Rosmer Rebecca West Kroll Ulric Brendel Peter Mortensgard Madam Helseth	Lewis Waller Elizabeth Robins Athol Forde Bernard Gould W. Scott Buist Miss Frances Ivor	as above	Florence Farr understudied Robins
	June 2 and 3 (mats.) Also June 9 and 10 (eves.)		THE MASTER BUILDER				Opera Comique	Halvard Solness Mrs. Solness Dr. Herdal Knut Brovik Ragnar Brovik Kaia Fosli Hilda Wangel	Lewis Waller Frances Ivor Charles Sugden Leonard Outram W. Scott Buist Marie Linden Elizabeth Robins	as above	
	Same Bill		BRAND (Act IV)					Brand Agnes The Gypsy	Bernard Gould (Partridge) Elizabeth Robins Frances Ivor		

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR / TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1893	ca. June		Mr. Punch's Pocket Theatre (reprinted by Heinemann)			Lyric	Torvald Helmer Nora Dr. Rank Mrs. Linden Nils Krogstad Mary Ann Helen Porter Flavio Ando Eleanora Duse Leo Orlandini Guglielmina Magazzari Ettore Mazzanti Cristina Buffi Eleanora Ropolo Alfredo Geri		Lessee and Manager - Horace Sedgwick. Directors - Carl and Theodore Rosenfeld. Stage Manager - Carl Ando, Business Manager and Treasurer - William Greet, Musical Director - Herbert Bunnell	In Italian
	June 9, 14, 17		A DOLL'S HOUSE				Dr. Thomas Stockmann Mrs. Stockmann Petra Ellif Morten Peter Stockmann Morten Kill Hovstad Billing Captain Horster Aslaugen Herbert Beerbohm Tree Alice Wright Lily Hanbury Master Skelly Dora Barton Henry Kemble Charles Allan James A. Welch E. Holman Clark A. Hamilton Revelle E. M. Robson Supernumeraries: Rowe, Dunn, Reid, Haslon, Fletcher, Morrell, Herbert, Saunders, Shepherd, Scarduck, Vincent, Lewis, Ravenscroft, Mason, Raucosolt, Gardner, Smith, Warner, James, Cregan, Reid, White, Stephens, Hethersley, Nicolls, Symonds, Frost, Spencer, Rowland, Trake, Keating, Rodwell, Short, Bellew	Trans. William Archer (from an American edition of the play)		
	June 14, 21, 28 (mats.) July 20, 21, 22 (eves. - mat. also July 22)		AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE			Haymarket	Halvard Solness Mrs. Solness Dr. Herdal Knut Brovik Ragnar Brovik Kaia Fosli Hilda Wangel Johannes Roemer Rebecca West Kroll Ulric Brendel Peter Mortensgard Madam Helseth James A. Welch Mrs. Edmund Phelps Mr. Wyes Orlando Barnett George Humphry Alice Kingsley Violet Vanbrugh Louis Calvert May Harvey W. Giffard E.V. Reynolds Mr. Paget Rose Roberts	Author Florence Bell	Independent Theatre Society	Billed after J.F. CRADLE (A.T. de Mattos) and DANIEL: AN IDYLL (G.H.R. Debbos and E. Riehton)
	June ca. 20th		Cheap edition of THE MASTER BUILDER publ. by Heinemann			St. George's Hall				Benefit for Louis Calvert. Supported by Calvert's and Helmsley's reperary company.
	July 10 (mat)		Strindberg visits London JERRY-BUILDER SOLNESS (a parody)							
	September 8		ROSEBUD			Theatre Royal, Drighton				

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR / TRANSLATOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1893	December	10	M.S. Gilliland lectures on "Ibsen's Women" to the London Ethical Society			Society Rooms, White Hart St.				
1894	January	26	Edward Russell lectures on Ibsen at University College, Liverpool							
		27	AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE			Gentlemen's Concert Hall, Manchester	Dr. Thoms. Stockmann		Manchester Independent Theatre Society	
	February		Janet Achurch negotiates with a German manager to sponsor performances of A DOLL'S HOUSE and ALEXANDRA in Berlin							
	April		C.H. Herford's trans. of FRANK publ. by Heinemann; 2nd edition of William Wilson's translation issued by Methuen							
	May 4 and 5 (eves.) 5 (also mat.)		THE WILD DUCK			Royalty	Haakon Werle Gregers Werle Old Ekdal Hjalmar Ekdal Gina Ekdal Hedvig Mrs. Sorby Relling Molvik Petersen Graaberg Jensen Gentlemen at Dinner: Flor Bale Karpersen	Trans. Frances E. Archer	Independent Theatre Society. Director - J.T. Grein, Lessee - Kate Santley, Producer - Herman De Lange, Musical Director - C.W. Lamartine, Furnisher - Oetzmann, Perruquier - William Clarkson, Costumes - Morris Angel and Son, Acting Manager - Charles Hoppe	
	ca. July		Elizabeth Robins invited by Evelyn Myers to perform Ibsen's plays in Cambridge							
	July	20	AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE			Haymarket	Dr. Thomas Stockmann Mrs. Stockmann Petra Elif Morten Peter Stockmann Morten Kill Hovstad Billing Captain Horster Aslaussen	Trans. William Archer	Producer, Lessee, and Manager - H.R. Tree, Perruquier - William Clarkson, Electrician - E. Windfield Rowles, Box Office Manager - W.H. Leverton, Stage Manager - Shelton, Musical Director - Carl Armstrong, Business Manager and Secretary - Frederick Harrison	Also included in Tree's summer tour of the provinces. London perf. billed with THE BALLAD-MONGER (W. Besant and W.H. Pollock)



YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1884	October			F. Edmund Garrett's translation of <i>HOWD</i> in the original meters published by Fisher Unwin						
	November	7, 9, 12	A DOLL'S HOUSE			Opera Comique	Torvald Helmer Dr. Rank Nora	Caesar Beck Herr Rusing Eleanore von Driller		In German
		27	HEDDA GABLER			Gentlemen's Concert Hall, Manchester	George Tesman Mrs. Hedda Tesman Miss Juliana Tesman Mrs. Elvsted Judge Brack Ellert Lovborg Bertha	Orlando Barnett Elizabeth Robins Alexis Leighton Florence Farr Charles Sugden Acton Bond Florence Hunter	Manchester Independent Theatre Society	
		30	THE MASTER BUILDER			Gentlemen's Concert Hall, Manchester	Halvard Solness Mrs. Solness Dr. Hordal Knut Brovik Regnar Brovik Kaia Fosli Hilda Wangel amateurs	Trans. William Archer and Edmund Gosse	Manchester Independent Theatre Society	
1885	December	3 (mon.)	LITTLE EVOLF copyright performance			Haymarket				
	January		Ibsen and the Drama, by 'Zavoni' publ. by Digby, Long and Co.							In Norwegian
			Heinemann publ. William Archer's trans. of LITTLE EVOLF							
		5	G.B. Shaw's first notice for the <u>Saturday</u> <u>Review</u>							
	February	23	E.F.S. Pigott's death; George Redford's succession as Examiner of Plays							
	Late February or early March		Alice Wright reads from <i>GHOSTS</i> , A DOLL'S HOUSE, and AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE at the home of Mrs. M.E. Hawels							
	March	25, 27 (sat.), and 28	ROSESHOULDS			Opera Comique	Johannes Rosmer Rebecca West Kroll Ulric Brendel Peter Mortensgard Madame Helseth	A.-F. Lugne-Poe Marthe Mollot Ripert Margot Seruzier Suzanne Gay	Producers - Theatre de l'Œuvre and the Independent Theatre Society, Directors - A.-F. Lugne-Poe, J.T. Grein, and Dorothy Leighton, Conductor - Louis F. Schneider, Perruquier - C. Fox, Furnisher - Lyon, Acting Managers - Arthur Somer- ville, Frederick W. Spratt	Billed with L'INVRISE (Hæberlinck) In French.

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT	REPLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1895	March	27, 30 (also mat. on 30th)	SOLNESS LE CONSTRUCTEUR				Opera Comique	Halvard Solness Mrs. Solness Dr. Herdal Knut Brovik Ragnar Brovik Kaia Fosli Hilda Wangel	A.-F. Lugne-roe Suzanne Gay Ripert Seruzier (?) Margeot Marthe Melliott Suzanne Despres	As for ROSESHOME (above). Costume Designer - A.-F. Lugne-Roe, Decorations - Paul Vogler, Producer - Maurice Maeter- linck	In French
1896	March	?	English trans. of Nordau's <u>Entartung</u> ( <u>Degeneration</u> ) publ. by Heinemann								
	May	6	THREEPENNY BITS (1 act burlesque)				Garrick	Violet Vanbrugh Arthur Bourchier	Author Israel Zangwill (based on his <u>Old</u> <u>Maids Club</u> )		Benefit mat. Billed with A QUIET RUBBER (C.F. Coghlan) and THE VICARAGE (C. Scott)
	December		<u>Penetration</u> , inspired by Nordau's book, publ. by Constable								
	ca. March		LITTLE EYOLF considered by the Independent Theatre Society								
1897	November	23-27 (mats) November 30 - December 19 (eves. with Saturday mats. Mat. only December 16. No perf. December 7)	LITTLE EYOLF				Avenue	Alfred Allmers Mrs. Rita Allmers Eyolf Miss Asta Allmers Borgheim The Rat Wife	Courtenay Thorpe Janet Achurch Stewart Dawson Elizabeth Robins C.M. Lowne M. Patrick (Stella) Campbell	Lessee - Charles H. Hawtrej, Manager - F.J. Harris, Acting Manager - C.G. Com- pton, Director - Elizabeth Robins, Producer - George R. Foss, Box Office Manager - H. Callan	
	December		JOHN GABRIEL BORGWAN copyright performance				Avenue	Cast changes from December 8-19: Rita The Rat Wife	Stella Campbell Florence Farr		
	January		William Archer's trans. of JOHN GABRIEL BORGWAN publ. by Heinemann								
	March		"Pretty Fanny's Ways...." a spoof on JOHN GABRIEL BORGWAN, publ. in <u>Theatre</u> (M. Watson)								
	April	12	A DOLL'S HOUSE				Gentlemen's Concert Hall, Manchester	Torvald Helmer Nora Dr. Rank Mrs. Linden Nils Krogstad Anne Marie	Charles Vane Janet Achurch Charles Charrington Miss Raffles-Brook Ryder Boys Marie Fauvet	Producer - Manchester Independent Theatre Society	

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT	PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR / AUTHOR	TRANSLATOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1897	May	3 - 7 (nats.)	JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN				Strand	John Gabriel Borkman Mrs. Borkman Erhart Borkman Ella Renheim Mrs. Fanny Wilton Vilhelm Foldal Frida Foldal Mrs. Borkmann's Maid	W.H. Vernon Genevieve Ward John Martin Harvey Elizabeth Robins Maud Tree James A. Welch Dora Barton Marianne Caldwell	Trans. William Archer	Producer - New Century Theatre, Promoter - John S. Clark, Stage Manager - W.H. Vernon, Acting Manager - H.J. Wilde, Scenery - Walter Bayes, Box Office Manager - Mr. Saxon	
		10 - 14 (nats.)	A DOLL'S HOUSE				Globe	Torvald Helmer Nora Dr. Rank Mrs. Linden Nils Krogstad Anna Ellen Einar Bob Emmie Porter	Courtenay Thorpe Janet Achurch Charles Charrington Vane Featherstone Charles J. Fulton Mary Stuart Florence Ashton Ethel Rayner Maud Evelyn Alice Scott H. Davis	Trans. William Archer	Producer - Independent Theatre Society, Lessee - W.S. Penley, Acting Manager - Wilfred Beckwith, Musical Director - J.M. Capel, Stage Manager - Wilton Harriot, Director - Charles Charrington	
		17 - 21 (nats.)	THE WILD DUCK				Globe	Haakon Werle Gregers Werle Old Ekdal Hjalmar Ekdal Gina Ekdal Hedvig Mrs. Sorby Relling Molvik Pettersen Graaberg Jensen A fat Gentleman A Balding Gentleman A short-sighted gentleman	Leonard Outram Courtenay Thorpe James A. Welch Laurence Irving Kate Phillips Winifred Fraser Ffolliott Paget Charles Charrington Leonard Calvert J. Bertram G. Edmond Alfred Wyn G. Nix Webber Robert Farquharson Ronald Bagnall	Trans. Frances Archer	As above.	
June		24 - 26		The Independent Theatre Society's third production (THE LADY FROM THE SEA) cancelled E.R. Russell's and P.C. Standing's Isben on his Merits publ. by Chapman and Hall			Queen's Gate Hall	Mrs. Helene Alving Oswald Alving Pastor Manders Jacob Engstrand Regina Engstrand	Alice Wright Courtenay Thorpe Leonard Outram Norreys Connell Alice Kingsley	Trans. William Archer	Producer - Independent Theatre Society, Manager - Charles Charrington	Performed during Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Week

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1897	July	19 - 24	A DOLL'S HOUSE			Grand Theatre, Islington	Torvald Helmer Nora Dr. Rank Mrs. Linden Nils Krogstad Anna Ellen Einar Bob Emmie Porter	Trans. William Archer	Producer - Independent Theatre Society	
1898	March			Loving Cup subscription for Ibsen's 70th birthday						
	May	21		G.B. Shaw resigns from the <u>Saturday Review</u>						
	December			Clément Scott resigns from the <u>Daily Telegraph</u>						
1899				The New Century Theatre schemes to present PEER GYNT with Grieg's music, but the project does not come off						
	ca. July			Georg Brandes' <u>Hennik Ibsen</u> . B. Jönsson. <u>Critical Studies publ. in English</u>						
				William Rothstein's <u>A Doll's House</u> , a cryptic painting inspired by Janet Achurch's performance, is completed						
1900	February	25	THE LEAGUE OF YOUTH			Vaudeville	Chamberlain Bratsberg Erik Bratsberg Thora Selma Dr. Fieldbo Stensgard Monsen Bastien Monsen Ragna Helle Ringdal Anders Lundestad Daniel Heire Mme. Rundholmen Waiter Asaksen	Trans. William Archer	Producer - Stage Society, Director - Charles Charrington	
							George S. Titheradge H. Granville-Barker Ethel Wheeler Winnifred Fraser Berte Thomas T.B. Thalberg Albert Gran Robert Farquharson Nathalie Brandt Dallas Anderson A. Whitby Herbert Swears Courtenay Thorpe Miss Carlingford Edward Knoblauch Charles Charrington			

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT	PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1900	ca. February				C.H. Herford's translation of LOVE'S COMEDY publ. by Duckworth						
	March				William Archer's translation of WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN publ. by Heinemann						
					G.B. Shaw proposes that the Stave Society produce PEER GWNT (Act I-III in one night, followed by Act IV and V the next night)						
	December	3			Recitations from PEER GWNT by Albert Gran		?				
1900 or 1901	?				Janet Achurch lectures to the Players' Club						
1901/2 season	?				B.W. Findon lectures the Players' Club on "The Trail of the Ibsen Serpent"		Victoria Hall				
1901	April	12 (mat.)			NORA ODER EIN RUPPENHEIM		Apollo				
	May	12 13 (mat.)			THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY		Strand Garrick	Consul Bernick Mrs. Betty Bernick Olaf Bernick Martha Bernick Johan Tonnesen Lona Hessel Hilmar Tonnesen Rorlund Rummel Vigeland Sandstad Dina Dorf Kraft Aune Mrs. Rummel Mrs. Holt Mrs. Lyng Hilda Rummel Netta Holt	Trans. William Archer	Deutsches Theater. Business Manager - J.E. Vedtrame Producer - Oscar Asche	In German. Invitation matinees.
1902	?				R.A. Streatfield's translation of Ibsen's poetry, entitled <u>Lyrical Poems</u> , publ. by Elkin Mathews			Oscar Asche Annie Webster Master George Hersee Mrs. Charles Maitby Albert Gran Constance Robertson Arthur Bromley-Davenport Charles Quartermaine Dalziel Heron S.B. Breerton A.H. Leveau Dora Barton D.J. Williams A.E. George Lucy Franklein Mabel Hardinge Sybil Ruskin Helen Thurby Ethel Marcus			

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YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES	
1902	May	4 (eve.) 5 (mat.)	THE LADY FROM THE SEA			Royalty	Dr. Wangel Arnholm Lyngstrand Ballestad Stranger Ellida Boletta Hilda	Norman McKinnel Charles V. France Arthur Royston Lionel Belmore Laurence Irving Janet Achurch Mary Allestree Muriel Ashwyne	Producer - Charles Harrington Stage Society		
1903	January	25 (eve.) 26 (mat.)	WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN			Imperial	Rubek Maja Inspector Ulfheim Stranger Lady Sister of Mercy	George S. Titheradge Mabel Hackney A. Morrice Seaton Laurence Irving Henrietta Watson Edith Craig	Trans. William Archer Stage Society. Producer - George R. Foss Stage Managers - Gay Waller and A. Horrice Seaton		
	April 15 - May 14 (30 perf.)		THE VIKINGS			Imperial	Ornulf Sigurd Gunnar Thorolf Dagay Hjordis Kare Egil Vikings, Guests, Serving-Maids, Outlaws, etc.: Misses Cecil, Wheeler, Norreys, Adamson, Archer, and McGregor, Clare, Norreys, Adamson, Archer, and King. Messrs. L'Estrange, Terry, Luff, Combe, Darch, Carew, Blackmore, Birch, Clark, Costerg, Ciuddy, Church, Davis, EScott, Fargeon, Godwin, Hill, Ludlow, Laundry, Langton, Lancaster, Mavis, Maxwell, More, Nock, Purdie, Russell, Vornhaden, Rane, Schonberg, Staite, Stanley, Thompson, Wood, Wittle, Zardi, Rane, Leslie.	E. Holman Clark Oscar Asche Hubert Carter Conway Tearle Hutin Britton Ellen Terry Mark Kinghorne Noel Compton Vikings, Guests, Serving-Maids, Outlaws, etc.: Misses Cecil, Wheeler, Norreys, Adamson, Archer, and McGregor, Clare, Norreys, Adamson, Archer, and King. Messrs. L'Estrange, Terry, Luff, Combe, Darch, Carew, Blackmore, Birch, Clark, Costerg, Ciuddy, Church, Davis, EScott, Fargeon, Godwin, Hill, Ludlow, Laundry, Langton, Lancaster, Mavis, Maxwell, More, Nock, Purdie, Russell, Vornhaden, Rane, Schonberg, Staite, Stanley, Thompson, Wood, Wittle, Zardi, Rane, Leslie.	Trans. William Archer Manager - Ellen Terry, Lessee - Lily Langtry, Designer and Director - Edward Gordon Craig, Music Composer and Direc- tor - Martin Fallas Shaw, Costumes - Edward Gordon and Edith Craig, Wigs - Clarkson, Props - Louis Labhart, Master Carpenter - E. Tarrant, Electrician - G. Flannagan, Property Master - E. Finch, Assistant Stage Manager - Fred Boustad		
	June 22, 23		LA MAISON DE POUPEE			Garrick	Helmer Nora Rank Krogstad Mrs. Linden (plus 3 children)	M. Tarride Mme Réjane Albert Mayer M. Chantard Ellen Andree	Lessee and Manager - Arthur Bouchier, Furnishings - Lyon and Co., Perruquier - William Clarkson, Business Managers - Arthur Aldin and Thomas Stevens, Stage Manager - Alexander Stewart, Acting Manager - M.V. Leveaux	In French	

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1903	October	7 (mat.), 20, and 29	HEDDA GABLER			Adelphi	Tesman Hedda Giulia Tesman Thea Brack Loevborg Berta	Carlo Rosaspina Eleonora Duse Annunziata Mazzini Guglielmina M. Galliani Antonio Galliani Ciro Galvani Modesta Bergonzio	Lessee and Manager - William Greet, Proprietors - A. and S. Gatti, Licensee Tom B. Davis, Treasurer - Ettore Mazzanti Stage Manager - Alfredo Gari	In Italian
1905	March	3,4,6,8,11 (mts. also March 4 and 11)	DER WILDEUTE			Great Queen Street	Werle Gregers Werle Der alte Ekdal Hjalmar Gina Hedwig Frau Sorby Dr. Relling Molvig Pettersen Groberg A Short Man A Fat Man A Thin Man	Bruno Wiburger G.F. Schwieger Johannes Korner Rudolf Leyrer Rosa Bertens Rose Grawz Adele Meyssel Hans Stock Karl Neumann Adolf Wather Karl Berger Phil Lessing F. Stern Karlz Patet	Deutsches Theater. Directors - Ihrs Andreen and Max Beh- rend, Producer - Max Behrend, Proprietor - W.S. Penley, General Manager - B.A. Meyer, Box Office Manager - Abbott, Furnishings - Oetzmann and Co., Perruquier - Enil	In German
	May	29 and June 7	HEDDA GABLER			Waldorf	Tesman Hedda Julie Thea Brack Loevborg Berta	Carlo Rosaspina Eleonora Duse Annunziata Mazzini Maty Wilson Antonio Galliani Ciro Galvano Modesta Bergonzio	Secretary Treasurer - J.O. Williams, Scenes - A. Rovescalli and Leolyn Hart, Proprietor - Waldorf Theatre Syndicate, Lessee - Lee Shubert, Managers - Messrs. Shubert, General Managers - George B. McAllan and Norman J. Norman, Business Manager - George Frederic Hinton, Costumes - Maison Worth, Directors - Alfredo Gari, C. Sorino, Ellis Dagnall	In Italian
	October 17, 20, 24, 27, 31, and November 3		THE WILD DUCK			Court	Werle Gregers Werle Ekdal Hjalmar Ekdal Gina Hedwig Mrs. Sorby Relling Molvik Patterson Graberg Jensen Kasperen Balle Flor Gentleman Waiter	Oscar Adye W. Scott Buist A.E. George H. Granville-Barker/ Trevor Lowe Agnes Thomas Dorothy Minto Ada Ferrar Matheson Lang Norman Page C.L. Delph Fred W. Lloyd R.F. Knox Edmund Gwenn Norman Page Kenelm F. Foss Lewis Casson L. Hamer	Managers - J.E. Vedreine and Harley Granville-Barker, Proprietor - J.H. Leigh, Lessee - J.E. Vedreine, Stage Manager - Wilfrid Franks, Musical Director - Theodore Stier, Business Manager - E. Taylor Platt, Box Office Manager - H.P. Towers	

YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT	PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAT	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1905	November	2, 30					His Majesty's	Stockmann Mrs. Stockmann Petra Elif Morton Peter Morton Kill Hovstad Billing Horster Aslaussen Petersen (a drunkard) Extra Gentlemen: Royde, Watt, Owen, Gray, Montesole, Southgate, Bellew, Palmer, Green. Ayrault, Arundel, Atkins, George, Powell, Bratt. Warmingtton, Gawthorne, Ousten, Sworder, Norfolk. Boone. Boys: Finn, Kent, Shaler, Cooke, Byrne. Ladies: Misses Wells, Skinner, Alexander, Burgess, Swanzy, Barton.	Trans. William Archer	Stage Manager - Cecil King, Musical Director - Adolf Schmidt, Assistant Stage Manager - Louis Mercanton, General Manager - Harry Dana	
-06		and January 18 - 20	AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE								
1906	January 28, and (mat.)	29	LADY INER OF ØSTRAAT				Scala	Lady Inger Elina Nils Lykke Olaf Skaktavl Nils Stensson Jens Bjelke Bjorn Finn Einar Retainer	Trans. Charles Archer	Incorporated Stage Society	
	February 3, and	March 23 and 24					Great Queen Street	Bernick Betty Olaf Fraulein Bernick Johann Fraulein Hessel Hilmar Tonnesen Rohland Kaufmann Rummel Kaufmann Wiegeland Kaufmann Altstedt Dina Dorf Procurist Krapp Schiffsbauer Auler	Trans. Charles Archer	Director - Willy Klein, Proprietor - W.S. Penley, Director - Hans Andresen, Inspector - Karl Berger, Perruquier - William Clarkson, Costumes - Nathan, Furnishings - Victoria Furnishing Co., Manager - H.S. Mandel, Box Office Manager - C.H. Abbott	In German
		(also mat. March 24)	DIE STUTZEN DER GESELLSCHAFT					Richard Starnburg Charlotte Kelly Grete Hahn Ida Weiss Hans Stock Else Gademann Georg Baselt Ingo Krauss / Ottomar Bloss Bruno Wiburger Paul Wind Ernst Reichert Margarete Russ Ottomar Bloss / Karl Berger Hans Andresen / Willy Klein .....cont.			



YEAR	MONTH	DAY	PRODUCTION	EVENT	PUBLICATION	MISC.	VENUE	CAST	ADAPTOR TRANSLATOR / AUTHOR	PRODUCTION STAFF	NOTES
1906	May	12 (2 parts)	ROSENHOLM				Great Queen Street	Frau Rummel Frau Postmeister Holt Frau Dr. Linggen Fraulein Rummel Fraulein Holt  Rosmer Rebekka Rector Kroll Brendel Mortensgaard Frau Helseth  Johanna Becker Asta Eggert / Hedwig Ostardt Helene Marschall Erna Lennox B. von Raalte  Hans Andresen Elise Gademann W. Klein Richard Starnburg George Baselt Ida Weiss  Nora  Mme. Néjane	Trans. Wilhelm Lange	Proprietor - W.S. Penley, Director and Producer - Hans Andresen, Inspector - Karl Berger, Perruquier - William Clark- son, Furnishings - Victoria Furnishing Co.	In German
	ca. June	27	A DOLL'S HOUSE				Garrick				

APPENDIX B  
FIRST PERFORMANCES AND TRANSLATIONS  
IN ENGLISH, GERMAN, AND FRENCH

NAME OF PLAY	DATE OF COPY- RIGHT	FIRST PERFORMANCE	GERMAN or A STRAN PREMIERE	FRENCH PREMIERE	FIRST LONDON PERFORMANCE IN 'WILTH' Not including copyright performances or recitations)	SUBSEQUENT LONDON PERFORMANCES (to 1906)
Catiline	1849	Stockholm, 1881			Royalty, 1936	
The Burial House	1850	Cristiania, 1850	Vienna, 1900		Clavier Hall, 1910 or 1912?	
Hanna	1851				Chelsea, 1921	
St. John's Night	1852	Bergen, 1853			Scala, 1906	
Lady Inger of Østraat	1854	Bergen, 1855	Berlin, 1878		Rehearsal Theatre, 1911	
The Feast at Solhaug	1855	Bergen, 1856	Vienna, 1891		Imperial, 1903	
Olaf Liljekrans	1856	Bergen, 1857			(Gaiety, Manchester, 1909)	
The Vikings at Hjelgeland	1857	Cristiania, 1858	Munich, 1876		Haymarket, 1913	
Love's Comedy	1862	Cristiania, 1873	Berlin, 1896	Théâtre de l'Œuvre, 1897	Opera Comique, 1893 (Act V only); Royal Court, 1912 (complete text)	
The Pretenders	1863	Cristiania, 1864	Berlin, 1876		Rehearsal Theatre, 1911	
Brand	1865	Stockholm, 1865	Berlin, 1898	Théâtre d l'Œuvre, 1895	Vaudeville, 1900	
Peer Gynt	1867	Cristiania, 1876	Vienna, 1902	Théâtre de l'Œuvre, 1896	Gaiety, 1880	Opera Comique, 1889; Strand/Garrick, 1901; Great Queen Street, 1906 (German)
The League of Youth	1869	Cristiania, 1869	Berlin, 1891			Novalty, 1889; Terry's, 1891; Criterion/Crystal Palace, 1891; Avenue, 1892; Royalty, 1893; Lyric, 1893 (Italian); Opera Comique, 1894 (German); Globe, 1897; Grand Islington, 1897; Apollo, 1901 (German); Garrick, 1903 (French); Garrick, 1906 (French)
The Emperor and Galilean	1873	Leipzig, 1896	Leipzig, 1896			Athenaeum (Tottenham Court Road), 1893; Queen's Gate Hall, 1897
The Pillars of Society	1877	Copenhagen, 1877	Berlin, 1878	Théâtre de l'Œuvre, 1897		Haymarket, 1894; His Majesty's, 1905-6
A Doll's House	1879	Copenhagen, 1879	Munich, 1880 (first performance of unaltered text)	Théâtre de Vaudeville, 1894 (privately per- formance in the salon of M <sup>me</sup> . Aubermann, 1892)	A hall in Argyle Street (School of Dramatic Art), 1885	
Ghosts	1881	Chicago, 1882	Augsburg (and Munich), 1886	Théâtre Libre, 1890	Royalty, 1891	
An Enemy of the People	1882	Cristiania, 1883	Berlin, 1887	Théâtre de l'Œuvre, 1893	Haymarket, 1893	

NAME OF PLAY	DATE OF COPYS- ITION	FIRST PERFORMANCE	GERMAN or AUSTRIAN PREMIERE	FRENCH PREMIERE	FIRST LONDON PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH Not including copyright performances or recitations)	SUBSEQUENT LONDON PERFORMANCES (to 1906)
The Wild Duck	1884	Bergen, 1885	Berlin, 1888	Théâtre Libre, 1891	Royalty, 1894	Globe, 1897, Great Queen Street, 1905 (German); Court, 1905
Roamsersholm	1886	Bergen, 1887	Augsburg, 1887	Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, 1892	Vaudeville, 1891	Opera Comique, 1893; Opera Comique, 1895 (French); Great Queen Street, 1906 (German)
The Lady from the Sea	1888	Cristiania and Weimar, 1889	Weimar, 1889	Lugné-Poe (Les Echoliers), 1892	Terry's, 1891	Royalty, 1902
Hedda Gabler	1890	Munich, 1891	Munich, 1891	Théâtre de Vaudeville, 1891	Vaudeville, 1891	Opera Comique, 1893; Adelphi, 1903 (Italian); Waldorf, 1905 (Italian)
The Master Builder	1892	Berlin and Trondheim, 1893	Berlin, 1893	Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, 1894	Trafalgar Square Theatre/ Vaudeville, 1893	Opera Comique, 1893; Opera Comique, 1895 (French)
Little Eyolf	1894	Berlin, 1895	Berlin, 1895	Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, 1895	Avenue, 1896	
John Gabriel Borkman	1896	Helsinki, 1897	Berlin, 1897	Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, 1897	Strand, 1897	
When We Dead Awaken	1899	Stuttgart, 1900	Stuttgart, 1900		Imperial, 1903	

NAME OF PLAY	DATE OF COMPOSITION	FIRST GERMAN TRANSLATION	FIRST FRENCH LANGUAGE TRANSLATION	FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION (Partial)	FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION (Whole)	SUBSEQUENT LONDON EDITIONS (up to 1906)	SOE OTHER EARLY TRANSLATIONS
Catiline	1849	1886	1903	1876-8(?) A. Johnstone, in <u>Translations from the Norse, for the British Society of Scandinavians</u>	Orbeck, 1921		Russian, 1886
The Burial Mound	1850				ca. 1910. Not published until 1921 (Orbeck)		
Norma	1851				Jorgensen, 1957		
St. John's Night	1852				ca. 1921. Jorgensen, 1957		
Lady Inger of Østraat	1854	1876	1903		C. Archer, 1880	C. Archer, 1906-12	Russian, 1886
The Feast at Solhaug	1855	1888	1903		W. Archer and Mary Marison, 1903	W. Archer and M. Marison, 1906-12	Russian, 1886
Olaf Liljekrans	1856		1903		ca. 1911. Orbeck, 1921		
The Vikings at Helgeland	1857	1876	1893		W. Archer, 1880	W. Archer, 1906-12	Swedish, 1876; Finnish, 1878; Russian, 1892
Love's Comedy	1862	1889	1896	1879, E. Gosse, in <u>Studies in the Literature of Northern Europe</u>	Gosse, 1872, unpublished. Harford, 1900	C.H. Harford, 1900 and 1906-12	Finnish, 1888; Russian, 1896
The Pretenders	1863	1866 (unpubl.) 1872 (publ.)	1893		W. Archer, 1880	W. Archer, 1906-12	Russian, 1896
Brand	1865	1872	1895 (or 1893?)		W. Willson, 1891	W. Willson, 1894 and 1899; C.H. Harford, 1894, 1898, and 1906; F.E. Garrett, 1894	Swedish, 1870; Russian, 1887
Peer Gynt	1867	1881	1896	E. Gosse, 1879, as above	W. and C. Archer, 1882	W. and C. Archer, 1886, 1889 and 1906-12	Russian, 1897
The League of Youth	1869	1872	1893		W. Archer, 1880	W. Archer, 1880, 1900-1, and 1906-12	Russian, 1896
The Emperor and Galilean	1873	1888	1893 (or 1895?)		Catherine Ray, 1876	W. Archer, 1880 and 1906-12	
The Pillars of Society	1877	1887	1893	W. Archer, <u>Mirror of Literature, 1878</u>	W. Archer, 1880, published in 1888	W. Archer, 1880, 1889, and 1900-1, and 1906-12	Dutch 1893; Italian, 1892; Russian, 1896
A Doll's House	1879	1880	1889		(Weber, 1880); H.F. Lord, 1882	W. Archer, 1889, 1890, 1892, 1897, 1900-1, and 1906-12; H.F. Lord 1880, and 1893	Finnish, 1880; Polish, 1881, Russian, 1883; Italian, 1884; Dutch, 1887; Portuguese, 1884; Yugoslavian, 1899, Hungarian, 1899
Ghosts	1881	1883	1889		W. Archer, 1880 (published in Boston by Walter H. Baker)	H.F. Lord 1885 and 1880; W. Archer, 1888, 1890, 1891, 1887, 1900-1, and 1906-12	Russian, 1891; Italian, 1892; Spanish, 1894; Portuguese, 1895, Swedish, 1883

NAME OF PLAY	DATE OF COMPOSITION	FIRST GERMAN TRANSLATION	FIRST FRENCH LAYFRAISE TRANSLATION	FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION (Partial)	FIRST ENGLISH TRANSLATION (Whole)	SUBSEQUENT LONDON EDITIONS (up to 1907)	SOME OTHER EARLY TRANSLATIONS
An Enemy of the People	1882	1883	1882		E. Marx Aveling, 1888	E. Marx Aveling, 1880, 1887, 1900-1, and 1906-12	Russian, 1891; Italian, 1892
The Wild Duck	1884	1887	1891 (or 1893?)		F.E. Archer, 1880	F.E. Archer, 1887, and 1906-12	Russian, 1892; Italian, 1895
Rosmersholm	1886	1887	1891 (or 1893?)		L.N. Parker, 1889	C. Archer, 1891, 1906-12	Finnish, 1890; Dutch, 1892; Italian, 1894; Spanish, 1894
The Lady from the Sea	1888	1893	1892		G.R. Carpenter, 1899 (in the Harvard Anthology, from the German translation by Julius Hoffory)	E. Marx Aveling, 1890 and 1891; F.E. Archer 1891, 1897, and 1906-12	Finnish, 1888; Russian, 1891; Spanish, 1894; Italian, 1894
Hedda Gabler	1890	1891	1891		E. Gosse, 1891	W. Archer, 1891 (2 editions), 1906-12; E. Gosse, 1891 (3 more editions) and 1898	Dutch, 1891; Russian, 1891; Italian 1893; Spanish, 1894; Portuguese 1895
The Master Builder	1892	1893	1893		E. Gosse and W. Archer, 1893	E. Gosse and W. Archer, 1893 (2nd edition), 1895, 1900, and 1906-12	Italian, 1893; Russian, 1893
Little Eyolf	1894	1895	1895		W. Archer, 1895	W. Archer, 1897, and 1906-12	Dutch, 1895; Russian, 1895; Italian, 1897
John Gabriel Borkman	1896	1897	1897		W. Archer, 1897	W. Archer, 1897 (2nd edition), and 1906-12	Russian, 1897
When We Dead Awaken	1899	1899	1900		W. Archer, 1900	W. Archer, 1900 (2nd edition), and 1906-12	

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APPENDIX C.  
SOME THEATRE CRITICS OF PERIODICALS SURVEYED

Journal	Dates	Critic
Academy	ca. 1891	Frederick Wedmore (for Ibsen: C.H. Herford)
Athenaeum	late 1890s-1914 1869-1907	Frederick George Bettany Joseph Knight
Daily Chronicle	ca. 1891-? ?-1904 1904-14	John Northcott Louis Frederick Austin Samuel R. Littlewood
Daily Graphic	1890-? 1890s-1900 1894-1906	Edward Fordham Spence Frederick Fenn Joseph Knight
Daily News	1868-1901 ca. 1891 1904-12	William Moy Thomas Edward Morton Edward Algernon Baughan
Daily Telegraph	1863-Aug. 1887 1871-Dec. 1898 ca.1891 1899- post 1914 late 1890s-1925 1898-9 1901-4	Edward Litt Laman Blanchard Clement Scott Lionel Monckton Malcolm Watson William Leonard Courtenay Thomas Macdonald Rendle H.C. Bailey
Era	ca. 1850-1880s 1880- ca. 1891 1882- post 1914	Edward Litt Laman Blanchard George Spencer Edwards Frank Desprez
Free Lance	1900-04	Clement Scott
Gentleman's Review	1890s	J.H. McCarthy
Globe	1885-1904 ca. 1891	William Davenport Adams Joseph Knight
Graphic	1870-pre 1894 ca. 1889	William Moy Thomas C.N. Williamson
Hawk	ca. 1891 1890s	J. Glover Augustus Moore ('Hawkshaw')
Illustrated London News	ca. 1890-96 1890s	Clement Scott Frederick George Bettany

Journal	Dates	Critic
Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News	ca. 1891 ca. 1891 ca. 1891 1901-20	Arthur Clements Ernest A. Bendall A.E.T. Watson James Wylie
Life	1888-93 ca. 1889-90  ca. 1894	J.T. Grein Pearl Mary Theresa Craigie ('John Oliver Hobbes') William Allison
Lloyd's Weekly News	1867-ca. 1884 ca. 1891	Thomas Catling John Northcott
Manchester Guardian	1880s 1880s-90s 1880s-90s 1880-1900 1890s	Adolphus W. Ward Allan N. Monkhouse Charles Edward Montague <i>William Thomas Arnold</i> Oliver Elton
Morning Advertiser	1880-94 1894-1909	Henry A.H. Howe Benjamin William Findon
Morning Post	1856-95 late 1890s Sept. 1895-1911	Charles Dunphie George E. Morrison Henry Spenser Wilkinson
New Review	1890s	Louis Frederick Austin
New York Dramatic Mirror	ca. 1895- post 1905	Henry Chance Newton ('Gawain')
Observer	1873/4-1912	Ernest A. Bendall
Pall Mall Gazette	1890- ? ca. 1891 Jan.- Apr. 1895	Edward Fordham Spence Lionel Monckton H.G. Wells
People	ca. 1891-94 ca. 1891-1909? 1890s- post 1914	William Davenport Adams Richard Lee Charles Palmer
Referee	1877-1911 1877-1928? ca. 1891- post 1914 ca. 1891 ca. 1891	G. Spencer Edwards ('Carados') Henry Chance Newton  Edward Morton ('Mordred') Richard Butler (also editor) Mr. Frost
St. James's Gazette	1880-88 Dec.1889- post 1891	Ernest A. Bendall  Malcolm Watson
Saturday Review	1883-94 Jan. 1895-8 1898-1910	W.H. Pollock (also editor) George Bernard Shaw Max Beerbohm



Journal	Dates	Critic
Sketch	1893-190?	Edward Fordham Spence
Speaker	1890-Sept. 1889 1904- post 1914	Arthur Bingham Walkley Desmond McCarthy
Stage	1881-1901 1881-7 ca. 1891 ca. 1891 ca. 1891 ca. 1891- post 1914 1901-37	C.L. Carson (also editor) Austin Brereton M. Comerford Cecil Howard Mrs. Venning Bernard Weller Lionel Carson
Standard	1872-post 1909 early 1890s ca. 1891 ca. 1891	Alfred E.T. Watson Malcolm Watson Ernest A. Bendall Arthur Clements
Star	1888-1900	Arthur Bingham Walkley ( 'Spectator' )
Sunday Times	1865-81 1880s 1881 1882-84  1883-4 ca.1884 - post 1892 1890-1916? 1894-6	Joseph Knight Cecil Howard ( 'Quasimodo' ) Desmond L. Ryan Hermann Klein Col. George William Adolphus Fitzgeorge (also editor)  Malcolm Charles Salaman Henry George Hibbert Edward Rose
Times	1876-82 1882-99 1897-99 1899- post 1914 1902-20	Mowbray W. Morris John Ferguson Nisbet St. John Hankin A.B. Walkley H.H. Child
Topical Times	ca. 1891	Cecil Howard
Truth	ca.1891-96	Clement Scott
World	1884-1905	William Archer

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4. William Archer and Janet Achurch (I.S.D.N., June 29, 1889)
5. Mr. Clement Scott (by Max Beerbohm) (The Candid Friend, October 26, 1901)
6. "Henrik Ibsen Receiving Mr. William Archer in Audience" (by Max Beerbohm) (Meyer, Vol. 2, 1971)
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Courtesy of the Theatre  
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1951)  
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